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KARNATAKA

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- THE BIG CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT
- THE INSIDE STORY OF HOW THE CONGRESS WON
- CAN IT REPEAT THE MAGIC IN UPCOMING POLLS?

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FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A year ago, the Congress party seemed to be galloping towards extinction. The media was awash with obituaries, marking nature's law that those who couldn't adapt would perish. As election after election brought dire news. The worst was Uttar Pradesh in March and Gujarat in December, bracketing 2022. The party itself seemed to breathe in the negativity. Victory in tiny Himachal Pradesh appeared like the lamp in hell that only made the 'darkness visible'. Karnataka, one of India's major states, turns that perception upside down. Now that the post-victory jockeying for the CM's post is settled with minimum blood loss, one can look back in totality at the most significant electoral triumph the Congress has pulled off in recent times—only Chhattisgarh in 2018 yielded a bigger vote and seat share. In Karnataka, the party's last such triumph came in 1989. That it happened in a direct fight with the BJP, for whom the stakes were high as it sought to breach the whole peninsula via Karnataka, enhances the symbolism.

The architects are a well-known duo. The new chief minister, Siddaramaiah, is a blunt-spoken man of the masses, toughened in the furnace, with a pan-Karnataka appeal and proven administrative record. A socialist from the Janata stock, once seen as an heir to the likes of former chief ministers S.R. Bommai and H.D. Deve Gowda, he had switched to the Congress about the time when, under Sonia Gandhi, it too was coincidentally taking a welfare-socialist turn. The other half of the duo is D.K. Shivakumar, a strategist, strongman and fierce Congress loyalist amid Karnataka's swampy caste-ridden politics from his days as a student leader in the 1980s. His appointment as state party chief in 2020 was a key turning point, as he pulled out what was dubbed "the Kamaraj Plan". Known to play a tight game based on "accurate intelligence", he also knows when to bend after driving a hard bargain, as he showed in the recent battle for the top post,

INDIA TODAY
THE FIERCE FIGHT

May 8, 2023

Along with them is a third Kannadiga stalwart: Mallikarjun Kharge. His elevation as AICC president added a resonant string to the Congress bow. Accounting for the 'Ahinda' umbrella, the Vokkaligas and a specific Dalit swing between them, they formed the demolition squad that vanquished the BJP.

A 43 per cent vote share spread across a complex community map, with seats in all six regions—how did the Congress pull this off? That's the inside track we flesh out in this week's three-part cover story, with Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa and Associate Editor Ajay Sukumaran filtering the sea of information from Karnataka and Executive Editor Kaushik Deka plugged into the Delhi end. The story begins about two years ago, during Covid. A party everyone believed to be comatose quietly set about watering itself at the roots, plotting a comeback. They took a leaf from the BJP playbook, creating a detailed, meticulously planned blueprint. All boxes were ticked and all circles were squared. For a change, method prevailed over vague good intentions. Behind the stage, a corps of coordinators and strategists burnt the midnight oil in a systematic, research-driven study of people's problems. Field surveys brought real-time feedback about the issues on the ground: this went into evolving a 'Five Guarantee' manifesto that evidently touched genuine felt needs. And because a plan guided all action and speech, what could have been a comedic three-legged race at the top turned out to be a happy synergy.

The BJP sowed the seeds of its own disaster as it began to trip on the basics. The internal rift worsened an image sullied by corruption charges and non-delivery. The passage from veteran B.S. Yediyurappa to Basavaraj Bommai, the nightwatchman who batted more than expected, made no difference. The memory of flood waters sinking the poshest parts of Bengaluru, high prices, particularly of gas cylinders, and the "40 per cent" taint created a strong wave of anti-incumbency that sank the BJP boat. For a change, the Congress quickly spotted the chinks in the armour and chipped away at them. The 'PayCM' and 'gas cylinder puja' campaigns hit the BJP where it hurt as it struggled to keep its vaunted image of efficiency afloat despite some development showpieces and "five crore beneficiaries" of central and state schemes.

Last October, Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra entered Karnataka, cutting a swathe through 500-plus kilometres across seven districts. It spun some of its most photogenic moments there, including the famous speech in pouring rain in Mysuru that the party's social media apparatchiks made viral. The passage re-energised a cadre long used to being in spiritless drift. This new sense of purpose, direction and fire in the belly came at just the right time in the battle—that supercharged infantry ran all over a floundering BJP. Tactically, the 'vocal for local' approach focused on things Kannadigas related to, like the Nandini-Amul controversy, and away from the Modi-centric game the BJP preferred. The BJP blundered in trying to scale the battle up to its favoured Hindu nationalist pitch in ways that did not fit the local idiom or temper. Themes like Bajrang Bali and internal caste reservation actually swivelled around to benefit the Congress. While the likes of J.P. Nadda, Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma hit the campaign trail along with Modi-Shah for the BJP, the Congress kept it very Kannadiga, only topping up with sparing use of Rahul-Priyanka. Also, they applied methodical principles in their candidate selection, and the first list of 124 was announced a clear month and a half before polling. A few key Lingayat rebels filled in the gaps left tactically open. It was a role reversal that saw Congress 'do a BJP on BJP'.

Now comes the more challenging job. Karnataka has to be governed. The five guarantees will cost about Rs 50,000 crore—nearly 20 per cent of a budget already burdened with a Rs 60,581 crore fiscal deficit. The Congress may look at Karnataka as a harbinger of good tidings in the four states due for polls next. But that's easier said than done. This model can't be replicated so simply in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh or Telangana. In the first two, the Congress goes in as the incumbent; in Rajasthan, the burden is doubled by an unseemly power squabble between Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot. Plus, Hindutva plays out more organically in the north. Undoubtedly, the win has put some vim and vigour in the Grand Old Party ahead of 2024. Success breeds success, they say. But past success meant nothing for Congress in 2019 in the general election when the BJP increased its tally despite Congress winning three state elections in 2018. Prime Minister Narendra Modi still has it in him to prove old proverbs wrong. Those who discount him do so at their peril.

(Aroon Purie)

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WINNING SMILES
Kharge (centre) with Siddaramaiah (right) and Shivakumar

14

COVER STORY

ANI

THE BURDEN OF VICTORY

After the spectacular win in Karnataka, what are the big challenges for the new government? Also, the inside story of how the Congress won. And can it repeat the magic in the upcoming polls?

INSIDE

UPFRONT

LOCAL BODY POLLS: BRAND YOGI IN UP PG 6

DELHI: ADVANTAGE AAP PG 8

LEISURE

MANOJ BAJPAYEE'S THESPIAN TURN PG 69

Q&A WITH FAF DU PLESSIS PG 76

MAHARASHTRA

45 BRACING FOR TOUGH TIMES

The Shinde govt gets a breather from the SC, but the challenges remain

TAMIL NADU

50 STALIN'S HINDU PUSH

The DMK govt is sprucing up the state's temples—and changing its own image

INDIAN NAVY

54 NEW LETHAL SEA DRONES

The navy is to acquire a fleet of uncrewed surface and underwater vessels

IIT SUICIDES

58 DEATH ON THE CAMPUS

What explains the alarming rise in suicides by IIT students?

SOCIETY & TRENDS

64 RETURN OF HANDWRITING

Recent studies show the therapeutic effects of writing by hand

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UPFRONT

SWEET SUCCESS CM Adityanath with his deputy CMs and others after the poll results, May 13

SUMIT KUMAR

LOCAL BODY POLLS

IT'S BRAND YOGI IN UP

By Prashant Srivastava

The results of the local body elections in Uttar Pradesh prove yet again that the Yogi factor remains strong in the state. With the chief minister himself leading the campaign, addressing 50 rallies in 13 days, the BJP swept the urban areas, winning all 17 mayoral seats, and improved its performance in the nagar panchayat parishads (191 out of 544 seats) and nagar palika parishads (87 of 199 seats). The three-tiered local body elections were held in two phases in the first half of May. As votes from a 53 per cent turnout (of the state's 43.2 million eligible voters) were counted, the Karnataka results—declared the same day—might as well have been happening in another galaxy. UP was in its own orbit.

The Samajwadi Party (SP), the main opposition party, drew a blank in the mayoral seats but managed to get chairperson posts in 35 nagar palikas and 78 nagar panchayats. The BSP won 15 nagar palikas and 37 nagar panchayats, and the Congress four and 14, respectively. The rest went to smaller parties and independents.

The elections were being held just weeks after the sensational killing of mafia don-turned-neta Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf while they were in police custody. Yogi carried the 'making UP safe' narrative into the polls—his "*Mafia ko mitti mein mila denge* (I'll grind the mafia into dust)" remark becoming his central plank. The fight against crime continued on the ground too; another dreaded gangster, Anil Dujana, was killed in a police encounter in Meerut a few days

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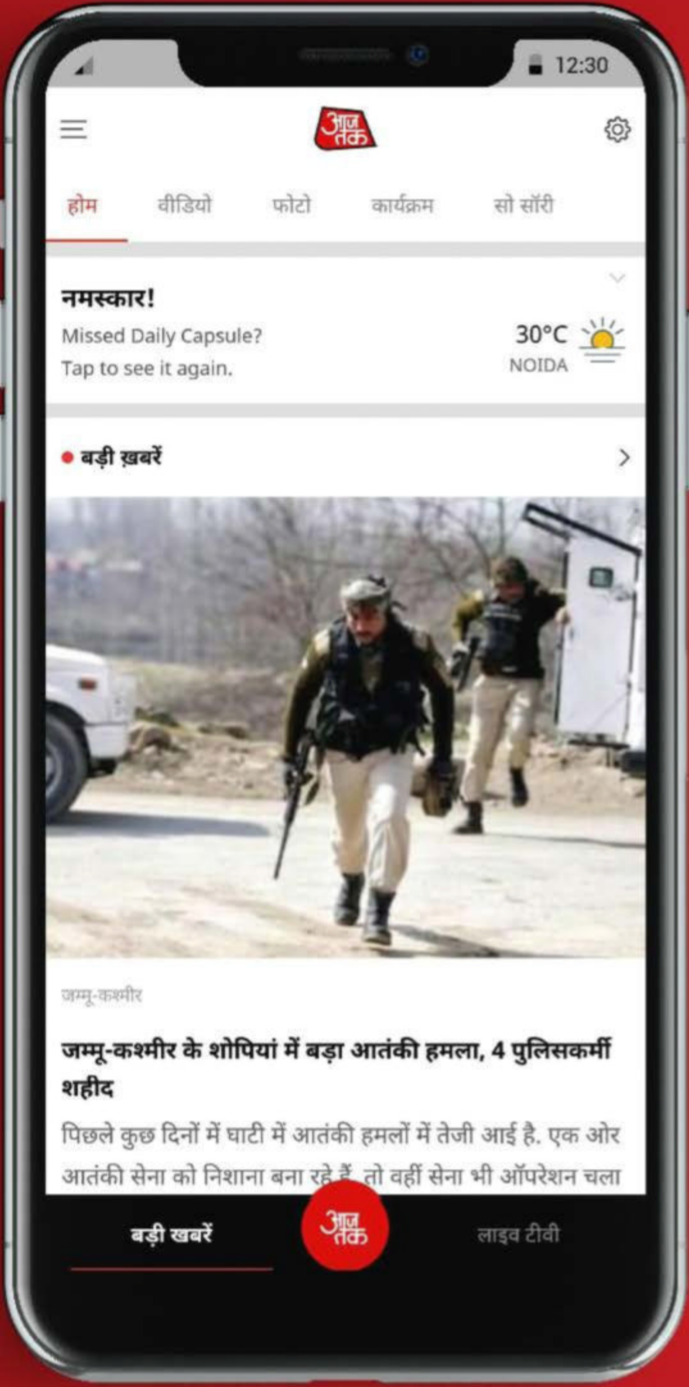

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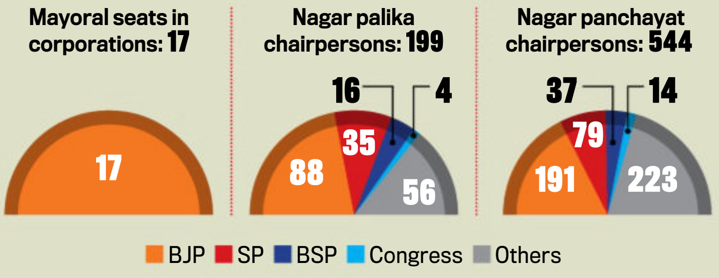
A BURST OF SAFFRON

The urban body polls were a washout for the Opposition, but it will be the BJP's gains in UP's rural areas that will be a bigger worry



ago. And at a rally on May 2 in Prayagraj, where Atiq once ran his fief, Yogi let the metaphors rip: "The world runs by the law of *karma…ye prakriti sabka hisaab baraabar kar deti hai* (everyone's accounts are settled on earth)."

Justice activists and the Opposition criticise the Yogi Adityanath government for extrajudicial killings, but the tough-on-crime 'Baba bulldozer' image has fetched the BJP electoral returns. The party even scored a "historic first" in Muslim-dominated Deoband, where Vipin Kumar, a former functionary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has been elected nagar palika parishad chairman. After the results, Yogi said the public has given a mandate for "good governance, development and fear-free environment".

As for the SP, it really needs to step back and introspect on why a 36 per cent vote share (in alliance) in the 2022 assembly poll has not translated into even a single win in the urban mayoral seats a year later. The cracks in the alliance were showing as the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) fielded its own candidates in several nagar palika and nagar panchayat seats where SP candidates were also contesting. There were a lot of complaints from local SP leaders too on the way tickets were distributed. The party's core Muslim vote bank also did not consolidate for these polls (in fact, 61 of the 391 Muslim candidates the BJP fielded won; five of them are now nagar panchayat chairpersons).

The BSP and Congress also got significant Muslim votes in pockets. In Moradabad, Jhansi and Shahjahanpur, the Congress was the runner-up in the mayoral seats whereas the BSP came second in Agra, Ghaziabad and Saharanpur mayoral seats. The AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen) candidate came in second in Meerut.

UP-based political analyst Dr Shilp Shikha Singh says, "The big win in the urban body polls was not surprising as the BJP has a proven track record there, but the improvement in tally in nagar palika and nagar panchayat seats is a significant change. And the fact that Muslim votes did not coalesce around the SP should worry that party." ■

The SP has to introspect on why it has lost ground a year after the good show in the assembly polls

By Kaushik Deka

Who should control the transfer and postings of bureaucrats in the national capital territory (NCT)? Here was a verdict that said Arvind Kejriwal's government, and not the Centre's representative, the lieutenant-governor (L-G), would have the final say over 'services' in Delhi. On May 11, what the five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud delivered was a unanimous verdict in favour of the Delhi regime. By all logic, that should have brought closure to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime's eight-year-old dispute with the BJP-led Union government.

However, less than 24 hours after the ruling, the battle saw another chapter opening. The AAP regime issued an order transferring services secretary Ashish More. But not only did More's department not act on the order, it also called the move "illegal", saying the court had earlier directed the central/state governments to establish a Civil Services Board to examine transfers before an officer's term was completed. AAP leaders, including services minister Saurabh Bhardwaj, allege More then went incommunicado, switching off his mobile phone. The Delhi government knocked on the doors of the apex court again, claiming interference and possible contempt of court by the Centre as More's actions allegedly violate the May 11 ruling. Justice Chandrachud has said he would constitute a bench to hear the matter.

The turf war over the appointments and transfers of bureaucrats—whose domain falls under 'services', under Entry 41 of the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution—started in 2015, just months after AAP came to power in Delhi. The state list categorises the areas over which state governments and assemblies have exclusive executive/legislative authority. The Union government has exclusive authority over subjects in the

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TOE TO TOE
Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal at a press meet in May

DELHI

ADVANTAGE AAP

Union list. The third list or the concurrent list outlines subjects on which both Parliament and the states can frame laws. As Delhi is not a full state, Article 239-AA has special provisions for it. Accordingly, it has no legislative or executive control over public order, police and land. These three remain under the jurisdiction of the Centre through the L-G. On May 21, 2015, the Union ministry of home affairs had issued a notification saying that the L-G would exercise control over 'services' too, the rationale being that the Delhi government did not have its own public services, like other states.

As a consequence, files related to postings or transfers were routed directly from the services secretary to the chief secretary, and then to the L-G, bypassing the Delhi government. The Kejriwal regime says this led to officers not being answerable for non-delivery of services to the people. AAP leaders claim officers routinely skip meetings and many of them don't even take their calls. "In one year, out of the 20 meetings called by the Delhi environment minister to prepare a winter pollution action plan, only one was attended by the environment secretary," AAP leader Jasmine Shah wrote in a newspaper column.

> **The SC verdict backed the AAP govt against the L-G on control of services, but the BJP-led Centre is unlikely to give up**

The AAP regime moved the Delhi High Court against the 2015 notification, but it ruled in 2016 that matters relating to 'services' fell outside the purview of the Delhi assembly. Following this, a long legal battle ensued in the SC. On May 11, the apex court ruled that the Delhi government needs to have control over its bureaucrats, failing which the principle of collective responsibility would be adversely affected. "If the officers feel they are insulated from the control of the elected government they are serving, then they become unaccountable...," read the order.

This means the AAP government now has the authority to transfer and post officers, frame service rules and undertake any other measure for governance, including passing a law relating to services. Secretary More became the first target in this exercise of power. However, his alleged defiance is not the only hurdle the AAP government faces. The decision about which IAS officer gets posted to Delhi, and for how long, continues to be the Centre's prerogative. Besides, the Delhi government stays debarred from intervening on matters relating to police, public order and land—apart from police brass, that keeps the officer cadre of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) beyond the AAP regime's purview.

AAP leaders express the apprehension that the Centre may promulgate an ordinance and later pass a law to bring services under its legislative and executive jurisdiction. The SC verdict does say that if Parliament enacts a law granting executive power to the L-G or the Centre on any subject that is within the domain of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD), their ruling can be modified. BJP IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya has already commented that Parliament might look at the option of enacting such a law.

Sources let on that the Centre will not give up its power to appoint Delhi's chief secretary, the link between the CM and the L-G. The Centre could invoke the 2021 amendment to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act, 1991, which makes it incumbent on the elected government to refer almost every decision to the L-G. This amendment was passed as a supplement under Article 239-AA. Any further legislative action may result in another round of public spats and court battles between the two governments. The 20 million people of Delhi deserve better. ■

GLASSHOUSE

BAD NEWS FOR KHABRI

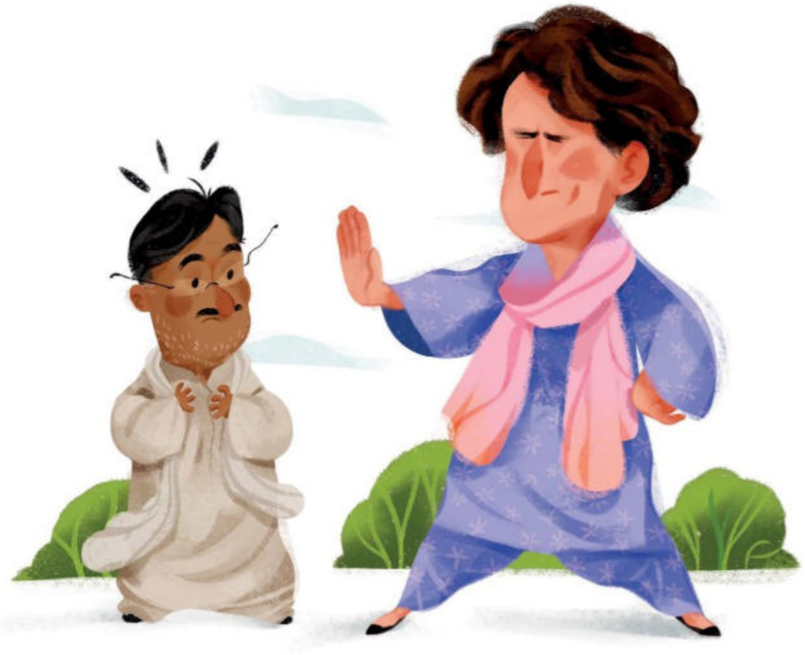


Illustration by **SIDDHANT JUMDE**

Following its disastrous performance in the Uttar Pradesh assembly election last year, the Congress high command had shunted out state party president Ajay Kumar Lallu, known for his proximity to UP general secretary in-charge **Priyanka Gandhi**. But his successor **Brijlal Khabri** has made no impact either. In the recent local body polls, the party did not win a single mayoral seat, managed just four out of 199 seats in the Nagar Palika chairman polls and 14 out of 544 seats in the Nagar Panchayat chairman polls. The party was also left embarrassed when it ended up with two candidates in Mathura. Khabri wanted his candidate to contest, but Priyanka's core team objected and fielded someone else. Looks like Khabri's days are numbered.

The 'K' Word

Gujarat may not have much of an Opposition given that BJP has 156 out of the 182 seats in the assembly, but some BJP leaders make up for it. So, while **Mansukh Vasava**, the tribal MP from Bharuch, alleged discrepancies in the tendering process for NREGA works in his area to favour particular contractors, Sehra MLA **Jetha Bharwad** alleged sub-standard work by contractors in the Nal se Jal scheme. The red-faced ministers of the respective departments squarely put the blame on the administrators. Given that the Congress barb of the Bommai regime being 'a 40 per cent sarkar' hit home in Karnataka, the Gujarat BJP is asserting that elected representatives are meant to 'audit' implementation, which they are doing effectively.

ADDED DISTINCTION

In the week that the Supreme Court gave a reprieve to his government, Maharashtra chief minister **Eknath Shinde** had another reason to celebrate. He secured his diploma in mass communication and journalism from the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University with distinction (77.25 per cent). Shinde holds a bachelor's degree and a certificate course in human rights from the same varsity. Now that's what you call a well-rounded education.

A Curious Dilemma

Many of the younger Trinamool Congress members revere West Bengal chief minister **Mamata Banerjee** as their mother. Some have even saved her number on their cellphones as Chhoto Ma (younger mom). But since they call her 'Didi', or elder sister, they refrained from paying her a tribute on Mother's Day. It did not stop them, though, from ensuring that Mamata's poem 'Ma', which she penned for the occasion, went viral. This is how it goes:

Jotoi dekhi, jotoi jani
Ma amader ashwasto bani
Ophuronto ma-er Bhalobasha
Amader jogaye praner aasha
(The more we see, the more we know/ Ma is the sound of assurance//Unbounded is her love/ It awakens hope for life)

Trouble-engine Sarkar

Defeat in Karnataka and violence in Manipur have given Opposition parties the chance to mock BJP's 'double-engine sarkar', or the benefits of having a state and central government of the same party. Odisha chief minister **Naveen Patnaik** was first off the block, saying good governance and not 'double-engine' government helps a party win election, seeking to pre-empt the BJP's narrative next year. Congress's **Jairam Ramesh** was next, calling Manipur violence a case of 'double-engine' failure. TMC general secretary **Abhishek Banerjee** had the best jibe, dubbing BJP governments "trouble-engine sarkar".

ANI

Kaushik Deka with Prashant Srivastava, Jumana Shah, Romita Datta and Dhaval Kulkarni

SOMNATH SEN

IN THE NET
Jharkhand cadre IAS officer Chhavi Ranjan arrives at the ED office in Ranchi for interrogation in the alleged land scam on May 4

JHARKHAND

BABU IN THE DOCK

By Amitabh Srivastava

As Ranchi deputy commissioner from July 2020 to July 2022, Chhavi Ranjan was expected to maintain land records scrupulously. But, on May 4, when the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Ranjan, accusing him of being involved in a slew of illegal land deals, they blamed him for dereliction of that very duty. Among the pieces of evidence against the 2011 batch Jharkhand cadre IAS officer presented by the ED is an instance of Ranjan verbally directing a circle officer to complete the mutation of a one-acre property in the name of one Bishnu Agarwal and his wife Anushree in spite of a dispute relating to it pending before the circle office. A forensic scrutiny of Agarwal's cellphone revealed that he had paid bills for Ranjan's tours in Goa. The arrangements were made through a travel agent in Delhi, who was paid in cash by one of Agarwal's staff.

In a 13-page document submitted to the special CBI and Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court, the agency has blamed Ranjan for allegedly facilitating illegal purchase and sale of several pieces of land, including one owned by the Indian army in Ranchi. On May 16, the court allowed the judicial remand of the 42-year-old till May 25. Ranjan was also suspended from his position of director of Jharkhand's social welfare department.

THE ED HAS ACCUSED RANJAN OF FACILITATING ILLEGAL PURCHASE AND SALE OF LAND

The ED zeroed in on Ranjan while pursuing a case it registered in June 2022 on the basis of an FIR filed with the Ranchi police in 2020. In it, Dilip Sharma, a Ranchi Municipal Corporation tax collector, had accused one Pradip Bagchi of using forged papers to fraudulently acquire the holding number of a property. The ED found it was a 455 decimal (around 4.5 acres) plot in Ranchi that one Laxman Rao had handed over to the army after independence, and which was fraudulently allotted to Bagchi in government records.

The plot, worth Rs 20.75 crore at the circle rate, was sold to West Bengal-based Jagatbandhu Tea Estate Pvt. Ltd for Rs 7 crore. According to the ED, a probe into the records of the circle office in Bargai, Ranchi, and the office of the Registrar of Assurances (Records), Kolkata, revealed that fake entries were inserted to falsify the original records pertaining to what was then defence land. The forgery was confirmed by the Directorate of Forensic Science Services in Gandhinagar.

As the ED dug deeper, it arrested seven people, including two government officials, Afshar Ali and Bhanu Partap Prasad. Prasad was the revenue sub-inspector with the Bargain circle office in Ranchi. Their confession exposed over a dozen land deals wherein Ranjan allegedly connived with them for the forging of deeds and documents, allowing illegal transfers of land. The ED has claimed to have seized incriminating evidence in the form of documents and digital devices during searches conducted in November-December 2022 and on April 24 and 26, 2023. The details suggest the existence of an organised group working in cahoots with land revenue officers, bureaucrats and politicians.

Though the Chota Nagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy (SNT) Act protect the land rights of locals in Jharkhand, the state has witnessed multiple land scams. Scamsters there have targeted government land, selling off plots to unsuspecting buyers with the help of fake papers. Taking note of the practice, the Jharkhand revenue, registration and land reform department in 2020 had ordered the display of information boards on all government land. However, it seems to have had a limited effect in deterring the syndicate of land mafia, middlemen and bureaucrats. ■

BOOKS

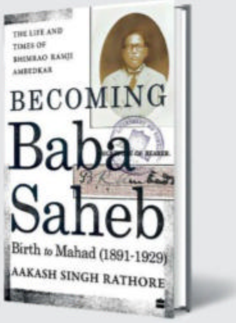
AN EXCEPTION

By Dinyar Patel

“I am not a part of the whole. I am a part apart.” This declaration of B.R. Ambedkar, describing a Dalit’s daily experience of ostracism and discrimination, rings throughout Ashok Gopal’s new biography. It is a fitting metaphor for the man. Ambedkar was intellectually a part apart—a brilliant, innovative thinker unafraid of smashing idols to pieces. And, of course, he was a part apart in a deeply tragic way, as a lonely voice of a people subject to unspeakable horrors, a man who earned two doctorates but for whom the mere act of drinking from a common well could incite mob violence.

Gopal’s book, the product of over 15 years of painstaking research, will be the standard-bearer for English-language biographies of Ambedkar. It has remarkable insights into Ambedkar’s intellectual development. Here is a man who stocked 40,000 books in his personal library, who taught himself constitutional law by locking himself in his office for two weeks while receiving meals and Irani cafe chai through a window. Previous work on Ambedkar has pointed to the intellectual influence of John Dewey, his professor at Columbia University. Dewey is ever-present here, but Gopal demonstrates how Ambedkar innovated upon the ideas of a diverse range of other intellectuals, from Voltaire to Karl Marx.

Nearly seven decades after his death, Ambedkar’s works still have the power to shock, disturb and shame. As Gopal notes about his own encounters with his oeuvre, “Ambedkar challenged almost every one of my preconceived notions about Indian society, culture, history and its well-known leaders.” He asked tough questions.


THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR
BECOMING
Baba Saheb
Birth to Mahad (1891-1929)
AAKASH SINGH RATHORE

BECOMING BABASAHEB (VOLUME 1): The Life and Times of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Birth to Mahad (1891-1929)
by Aakash Singh Rathore
HARPERCOLLINS
₹699, 300 pages

A lively investigation of Ambedkar as a young man. Rathore's biography takes on his predecessors and finds them wanting, whether "lifeless anglophone biographies" or the canonical works of Dhananjay Keer and C.B. Khairmoday ("riddled with inaccuracies"). This book has stirred controversy for references to Ambedkar's romantic life, more of which, presumably in the next volume.

AL LIFE

A PART APART
THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF B.R. AMBEDKAR
ASHOK GOPAL

A PART APART
The Life and Thought of B.R. Ambedkar
by Ashok Gopal
NAVAYANA
₹999; 864 pages

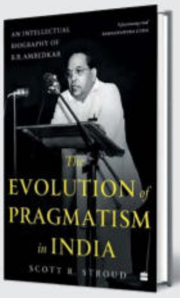
How could social democracy survive amidst caste bigotry? What would be the fate of minorities in a society whose moral and religious groundings rejected the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity? Ambedkar's answers were frank, bold and radical. What emerges in Gopal's book is a very different discovery of modern India. He told Gandhi and Nehru that their nationalist vision would merely entrench inequality: "Swarajya for whom and for what?" He told the orthodox that, far from being heirs to a glorious sanatan dharma and Indic culture, they were the enforcers of a vile medievalism.

Ambedkar's life was a search for alternatives. He scoured other intellectual traditions for insights on morality and democracy, but ultimately found the best embodiment in the Buddha. Gopal chronicles how Ambedkar's interest in Buddhism developed over decades and how it related to his earlier Hindu identity and attempts at social reform. Importantly, Gopal points out that Ambedkar did not simply craft the Buddha's teachings into a secularised ethical creed. Recognising the power of faith in India, he wanted Buddhism to be a lived religion for converts. It would replace Vedic strictures with an emotional attachment to the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. Only when these principles sank into the religious subconsciousness of India could there be a real chance of democracy.

One of the book's strengths is that, like its subject, it constantly questions and criticises. *A Part Apart* is far from being a hagiographical account. Ambedkar, Gopal tells us, could be a reluctant leader, something that occasionally stymied Dalit politics. Like his nationalist foes, he was an indifferent family man. While Ambedkar studied at Columbia, his long-suffering first wife Ramabai made cow-dung patties in Worli. He told his second wife Savita, "My books have been my companions; they are dearer to me than my wife and children." Ambedkar's politics could be profoundly inconsistent. He ensured widespread female participation in Dalit activism but, a day after his conversion in Nagpur, he excoriated Nehru for fielding so many women candidates for upcoming elections: "Who will take care of their children?"

These inconsistences also made Ambedkar a part apart. He read, forged opinions, read some more, and revised those opinions. As Gopal's biography makes clear, he had little tolerance for rigid ideology, instead crafting his politics on an unstinting defence of basic morality and human dignity. In this sense, *A Part Apart* is essential reading for all who wish to see a kinder, more egalitarian and more democratic India. ■

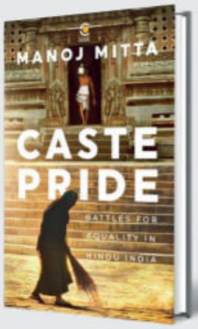
Dinyar Patel *teaches history at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research in Mumbai*


AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF B.R.AMBEDKAR
The EVOLUTION of PRAGMATISM in INDIA
SCOTT R. STROUD

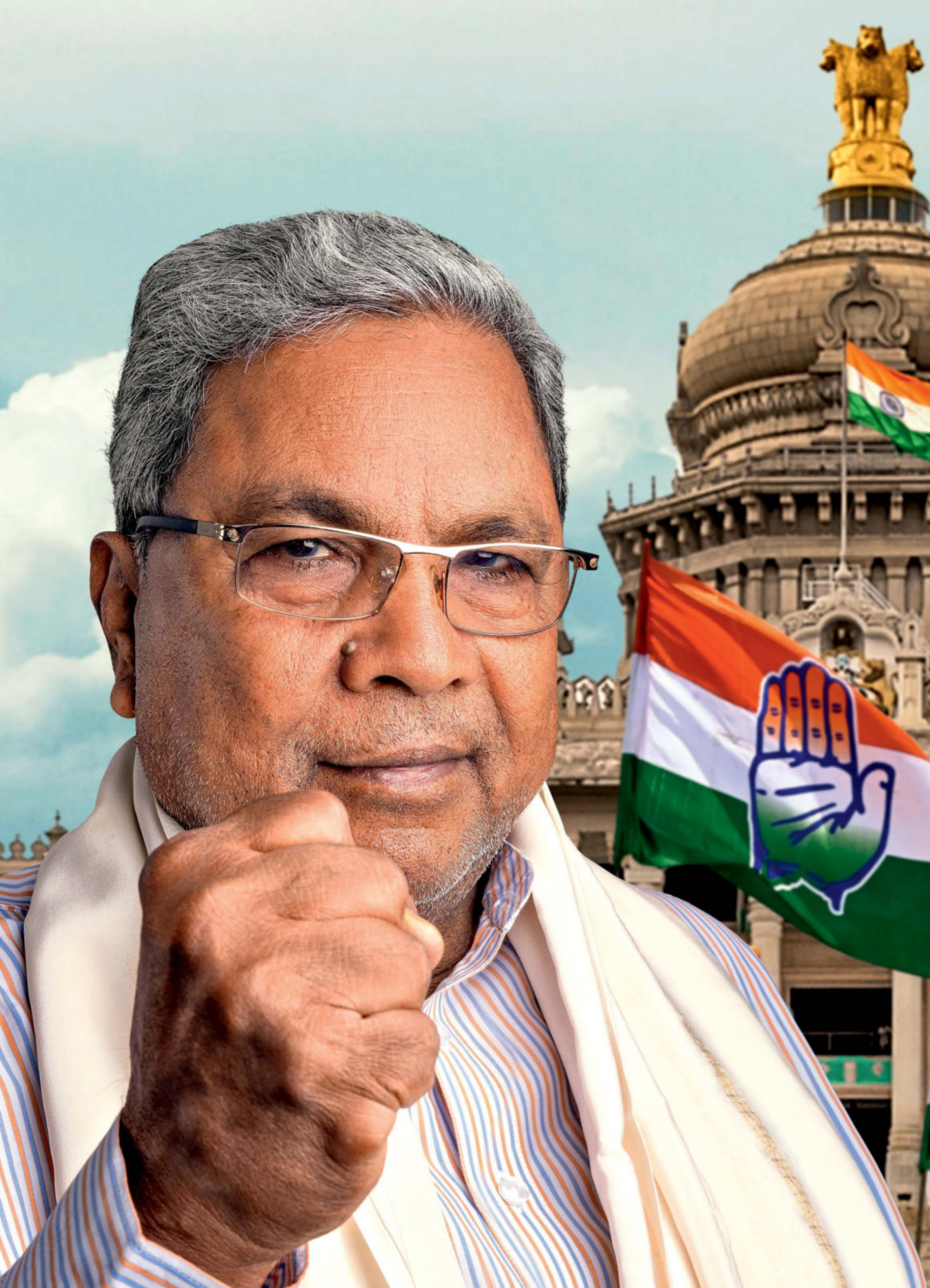
THE EVOLUTION OF PRAGMATISM An intellectual biography of B.R. Ambedkar
by Scott R. Stroud
HARPERCOLLINS
₹599, 312 pages

Nothing so racy in this rather more high-minded account. The focus here is on Ambedkar's intellectual relationship with his Columbia professor, the American John Dewey, a leading light of the action-oriented and 'meliorist' school of pragmatist philosophy. This is a bookish account, but not as dry as you might expect. Illuminated with moments of archival discovery and a keen sense of how Ambedkar drew on his engagement with his American mentor but also pushed back critically as he forged his own path to 'Navayana Pragmatism'.

CASTE PRIDE
Battles for Equality in Hindu India
by Manoj Mitta
CONTEXT
₹999, 624 pages



This is no biography, but a study Ambedkar would likely have enthusiastically endorsed. Accessibly written and deeply researched, this book traces the intertwined threads of caste-related violence and conflict as well as legislation and social activism over some 200 years. Along the way, Mitta unravels the prejudices and power dynamics that course through modern India's justice system and celebrates a number of 'unsung heroes' who deserve their place in Ambedkar's cohort.



THE BURDEN OF VICTORY

NEW CM SIDDARAMAIAH WILL NOT HAVE IT EASY WITH HIS MAIN RIVAL IN THE CO-DRIVER'S SEAT. THEN THERE'S THE HUGE TASK OF EXECUTING THE PARTY'S '5 GUARANTEES'

By **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

In crunch-time, the twin poles of the Congress in Karnataka, Siddaramaiah and D.K. Shivakumar (DKS), buried the hatchet and kept their eyes firmly on the mutual goal—winning the state for the party. Three days before Karnataka went to the polls on May 10, Congress election managers even hit upon an imaginative coup de grace in optics. They put out a video of the two stalwarts engaged in a relaxed, freewheeling conversation in the manner of old compatriots, exchanging notes and firming up plans for the future. But in victory, the rivalry between Siddaramaiah, the mass leader, and DKS, the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president, was evident to all.

Both had a strong claim to the top seat. If Siddaramaiah, 75, was the able administrator who was chief minister for a full five-year term between 2013 and 2018; DKS, 61, was the astute organiser under whose leadership the Karnataka Congress has now delivered its best election result since 1989. If one laid claim to a social blend of backward classes, minorities and Dalits, the other represented the powerful Vokkaliga community whose backing won the southern Karnataka region for the party. While Siddaramaiah had the support of a majority of Congress MLAs, DKS's calling card was his unflinching loyalty to the party. The decision, eventually left to the party high command, this time comprising another Karnataka veteran—AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge—saw four days of hard negotiations playing out in Delhi before a truce was hammered out.

In the end, Siddaramaiah edged ahead and is set for a second term, while DKS, for now, has to settle for the post of deputy CM with a few important portfolios. All through the negotiations, there had been speculation of a rotational

Photograph by **BANDEEP SINGH**; *Photo-montage by* **AMARJEET SINGH NAGI**

tenure in which DKS would get a shot at the top job, but that did not figure in the eventual announcement. The latter, however, will also keep the post of KPCC chief. The Congress was essentially playing it safe here. With a crucial Lok Sabha election in a year's time, and having coasted to power with a 43 per cent vote share, it is looking to ride the prevailing mood in Karnataka. But even ahead of the election, Siddaramaiah was seen to have the edge in a popularity contest—in fact, an early gambit to test the waters on that front had come in August 2022 when his supporters organised a mega rally at Davanagere in central Karnataka to celebrate his 75th birthday. Close aides say the success of that rally, which Rahul Gandhi had attended, had given Siddaramaiah the assurance he was looking for. In contrast, DKS's Achilles heel is that he faces several cases of income-tax evasion and money-laundering, which, he maintains, are a consequence of locking horns with the BJP in the past, especially in helping out the late Ahmed Patel win a crucial Rajya Sabha election in Gujarat in 2017.

Hailing from Siddaramanahundi village in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah, who goes by his first name, is a lawyer by training who was drawn to Lohiaite socialism and won his first election in 1983 from Chamundeshwari, contesting as an independent. For the next two decades, he was part of the Janata Parivar in its various avatars, twice serving as deputy chief minister. In 2005, his bid at social engineering as an Ahinda leader (the Kannada acronym for the grouping of minorities, backward classes and Dalits) led to a fallout with mentor and Janata Dal (Secular) chief H.D. Deve Gowda, following which he joined the Congress. A blunt-speaking politician, Siddaramaiah had led the party charge in the assembly in the past five years as leader of the Opposition. "Between 2013 and 2018, when we were in power, we fulfilled all our promises. People remember our programmes," he told INDIA TODAY in an interview in April, explaining that the priority ahead would be to address corruption. "People are talking about corruption on the street. This has never happened before in Karnataka." Siddaramaiah has also been a strident critic of the quantum of central funds allocated to Karnataka, calling it an injustice to the state. "Every year, they are reducing the central assistance. Thereby, a situation was created where the state government had to take on more debt," he says. "This year, the outgo on repaying debt is Rs 56,000 crore, according to the budget. If you reduce this, say, by Rs 20,000 crore or even Rs 15,000 crore...at least that much will be freed up for development."

The immediate challenge before the new government, however, will be the implementation of the five Congress guarantees, the main plank on which the party fought the election. It had promised to take these up—a mix of new schemes and extensions of existing ones—in the first cabinet meeting of the new government. For instance, while Karnataka already provides free power of up to 75 units to SC/ST families, the Congress has promised 200 units of free power to every household. Similarly, BPL families currently get 5 kg of free rice—this will go up to 10 kg of foodgrains. The other three guarantees are new schemes—monthly allowance of Rs 2,000 for every woman who heads a family, unemployment dole of Rs 3,000 for graduates and Rs 1,500 for diploma-holders for two years; and free bus travel for women in state transport buses.

Karnataka's annual expenditure on subsidies for the current fiscal is estimated at Rs 31,367 crore, or 13.8 per cent of total revenue receipts. Nearly 42 per cent of this—an estimated Rs 13,163 crore—goes to power subsidies, including supply of free electricity to irrigation pump sets. Foodgrains distribution, agriculture and housing subsidies make up the remainder. The Medium Term Fiscal Plan 2023-27 says the state's non-scheme committed expenditure will rise steeply year-on-year owing to higher outgo on salaries, pensions and interest payments. Expenditure on these heads is already 60 per cent of revenue receipts. "Hence, there is an urgent need for greater revenue mobilisation as well as rationalisation of subsidies to sustain the projected levels of committed expenditure within the limits of Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2002," the

MANISH RAJPUT

DEPUTY, FOR NOW
DKS leaves party president Kharge's residence after a meeting, May 17

DKS'S ACHILLES HEEL IS A BUNCH OF I-T AND MONEY-LAUNDERING CASES, WHICH HE MAINTAINS ARE **A RESULT OF LOCKING HORNS WITH THE BJP IN THE PAST**

document had noted. Incidentally, while outgo on salaries is set to increase when the 7th Pay Commission pay scales are implemented, at least 258,000 government posts—a third of the total 769,000 in Karnataka—were lying vacant as of December.

The state's revenue collections have seen a robust recovery post-Covid, registering 17 per cent year-on-year growth up to January 2023 due to a revival in private consumption and capital formation. "If there is more revenue, this is the time to reduce subsidies, look at areas of investment that provide proper livelihoods to people. Their earnings must go up," says Dr A. Ravindra, former Karnataka chief secretary.

"When the power sector is already under considerable fiscal pressure, announcing further subsidies just bleeds the budget. Unless you have alternative sources of revenue coming in to meet that cost, somebody has to pay for it," says retired bureaucrat G. Gurucharan, who last year carried out a comprehensive study of the power sector for the Karnataka government. Power sector reforms are crucial—currently,

BUMPY ROAD AHEAD

THE '5 GUARANTEES': Karnataka already spends Rs 31,367 cr. annually on subsidies. With the additional expenditure required for the '5 guarantees', managing state finances will become a challenge

FILLING UP GOVT VACANCIES: The party has promised to fill up vacancies in all departments in a year. A third of the total 769,000 govt jobs are lying vacant

REVISITING OBC RESERVATION: The poll manifesto promises to increase the reservation ceiling from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. This includes restoring the 4 per cent Muslim reservation and hiking reservation for other OBC groups

CASTE CENSUS: The party has promised to release the socio-economic caste survey done during the previous Siddaramaiah term (2013-18). The contentious census has been in cold storage

OLD PENSION SCHEME: The manifesto promises to 'sympathetically consider' extension of OPS to pensionable staff who joined service after 2006

STATE EDUCATION POLICY: The poll manifesto promises to reject the National Education Policy and implement a State Education Policy

FIXING BENGALURU: It promises to enact a comprehensive legislation exclusively for the management of municipal corporation Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, bringing all utilities under a single agency. Also, to create a mega 'Bengaluru Region' commercial and industrial users pay more than the cost while all other categories, such as domestic consumers or civic utilities, are subsidised. Besides, the skewed structure of tariffs—where power costs are increased to offset the low recovery of fixed costs—has driven high-paying consumers to source cheaper power from open exchanges. Finally, there is a need to accurately assess power consumption by metering all connections, including agri pumpsets, even if these are not being charged. "If they bring in these reforms, then it should not be such a big deal to give it to the poor. I think it's fair to say that the farming community and the poor deserve to get electricity at subsidised rates," says Gurucharan.

But it's not as though all the subsidy schemes will be implemented straightaway. "There will be some conditionalities...and then they may spread it over the five years. That's how it works in practice," explains Ravindra. In a press conference in Bengaluru on May 2, former Union finance minister P. Chidambaram pointed out that Karnataka was already providing certain units of free electricity and foodgrains. "If you look at the incremental cost of these five guarantees, it will be about Rs 30,000-35,000 crore," he said, explaining that it would add up to about 10 per cent of the state's budget size of around Rs 3.09 lakh crore. "In my humble view, 10 per cent of the budget being devoted to essential welfare schemes is absolutely necessary," he added.

Welfare schemes apart, the Siddaramaiah government will have other pressing matters on its plate. Top among these will be addressing regional disparities that have stymied growth in the northern regions. The outgoing BJP regime had pursued a 'Beyond Bengaluru' initiative to push investments in the digital economy in Tier-2 towns. In its manifesto, the Congress has promised to reserve Rs 5,000 crore each year for infrastructure development in the backward Kalyana Karnataka region and a separate Rs 5,000 crore grant to establish a Kittur Karnataka Development Board. In addition to this, it will have to urgently fix Bengaluru, the state's cash cow. The capital city's infrastructure and civic woes are well-known; Bengaluru's last masterplan expired in 2015 and a new one is still a work in progress after eight years. "If Bangalore is an IT hub, it is because the Congress governments made it so," says Siddaramaiah. That makes it a doubly important task for the new CM.

Other challenges abound: with corruption endemic in the system, the new government will have to plug the leaks and spruce up the administration. In Siddaramaiah's earlier tenure, he had controversially defanged the state's Lokayukta—which had been a much-feared institution at its zenith a decade ago—and instead set up an Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which functioned under the government. In August 2022, the Karnataka High Court, ruling on a batch of public interest litigations, abolished the ACB and restored the Lokayukta's original powers to investigate cases. The result was evident: while the ACB had not registered any criminal cases against ministers, MPs, MLAs or MLCs over a period of six years, the Lokayukta, within six months of its revival, had made its first high-profile arrest this February by trapping the son of a BJP MLA while allegedly receiving a bribe.

Though a seasoned administrator, Siddaramaiah had in his first term come in for criticism from various quarters, especially the dominant Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities, which chafed at being sidelined. Hence, while his government successfully implemented a bouquet of welfare schemes, it was eventually this resentment among the powerful caste groups that hurt the Congress in the 2018 election. This time around, with the party winning the support of every major community, the new government will have to proceed with more tact in administration and politically—especially so in navigating tricky issues such as revisiting the reservation policy and dusting off the contentious caste census report prepared during Siddaramaiah's previous term.

Then, of course, there is the delicate task of cabinet formation. Siddaramaiah and DKS have worked together before, when the latter was minister for energy during his first term as CM (2013-18). But even back then, the two didn't hit it off. In fact, DKS, though by then a senior partyman who had been minister twice in previous Congress governments, was kept out of the cabinet for nearly eight months before the high command stepped in. But if DKS had been eyeing the top job this time around, there were several other senior Congressmen too who considered themselves eligible—among them, M.B. Patil and G. Parameshwara were open about their aspirations. The key task now for Siddaramaiah, and the party, will be in picking ministers from this pool of seniors, while also keeping a mindful eye on giving appropriate representation to each community.

SIDDARAMAIAH **SAYS HE WILL WORK TO REDUCE CORRUPTION,** BUT IN HIS EARLIER TENURE, HE HAD CONTROVERSIALLY DEFANGED THE STATE'S LOKAYUKTA, A MUCH-FEARED INSTITUTION AT ITS ZENITH

With the Lok Sabha polls in a year's time, Karnataka is a crucial state for the Congress as well as the BJP. In 2019, the latter had swept 25 of the state's 28 Lok Sabha seats while the Congress retained only one. The sole winner, incidentally, was D.K. Suresh, KPCC president DKS's brother. The onus thus will be on DKS to keep the momentum going. "He will continue as PCC president till the parliamentary elections are over," said AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal on May 18 while announcing the new CM and deputy CM. Both Siddaramaiah and DKS, he said, were "big assets of the Congress party" in the state. Now in power, the duo will have to deliver on key promises while keeping the party unit fighting fit for the next big test. ■

A PLAYFUL COAST

Tamil Nadu's beautiful coastline offers a slew of watersports and coastal tourism experiences

Tamil Nadu has always been known for its gorgeous beaches lining India's eastern coast. In recent years, the long coastline has also emerged as an exciting hub for watersports.

Kovalam or Covelong Beach near Chennai received the prestigious Blue Flag tag from the Denmark Environment Agency in September 2021. The coveted certification was awarded for the beach's cleanliness, green cover, eco-friendly management practices, and excellent visitor facilities like safe swimming zone, loungers and hammocks and outdoor fitness equipment. Kovalam is also a major centre for surfing, and is home to a world-class surfing school. A surfing and yoga festival is organized on the beach here annually.

Rameswaram, which lies next to the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, is another major watersports destination. Exciting activities like scuba diving and snorkelling are offered in the gulf's pristine waters. The coral reefs here teem with colourful fish and an astonishing variety of marine fauna. Those who can't swim can still peek into this wet wonderland by opting for a ride in a glass-bottomed boat to the reefs. The excellent wind conditions in Rameswaram have made it a popular haunt for kite surfing enthusiasts.

Another major coastal centre for adventure activities in Tamil Nadu is Thoothukudi or Tuticorin. Visitors can indulge in activities like kayaking and canoeing, scuba diving, snorkelling, as well as surfing and kitesurfing here. Wakeboarding, stand-up paddle boarding and fishing are some of the activities on offer. Thoothukudi also boasts a stellar watersports academy. Apart from adventure sports, this pearl-fishing centre has the Panimaya Matha Church built by the Portuguese in 1711 and the stunning-looking Manapad Beach.

Indeed, the entire Tamil Nadu coast is lined with beautiful beaches which invite visitors for an adventure or to just lounge about and watch the waves roll in. Major beaches of the state include Marina Beach—the longest urban beach—and the Edward Elliot's Beach of Chennai. Just 60 kilometres south of Chennai is Mamallapuram. It's not only home to beautiful stretches of sand but also the world-famous Shore Temple, setting of the annual Mamallapuram International Dance Festival. The temple, along with Arjuna's Penance, one of the largest open-air rock reliefs in the world, and the monolithic chariot-shaped temples (Pancha Rathas), comprises a group of monuments which are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Other highlights of the Tamil Nadu coast include the mangroves of Pichavaram; the ancient port city of Poompuhar; the Chola-era settlement of Nagapattinam which boasts Chudamani Vihara, an important Buddhist structure, as well as a British-era lighthouse; the former Danish settlement of Tharangambadi; and Kanniyakumari, the southernmost tip of mainland India.

Tamil Nadu is a land of vibrant cultures, spellbound attractions, and memorable journeys. It is truly a destination where stories never end.

KARNATAKA

THE CONG

THE INSIDE STORY OF HOW THE STATE WAS WON AND THE LESSONS THE GRAND OLD PARTY CAN LEARN FROM THIS SUCCESS

By **RAJ CHENGAPPA** *with* **KAUSHIK DEKA** *and* **AJAY SUKUMARAN**

Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

UNITED WE WIN
Congress president Kharge with Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Surjewala and others in Bengaluru, May 13

QUEST

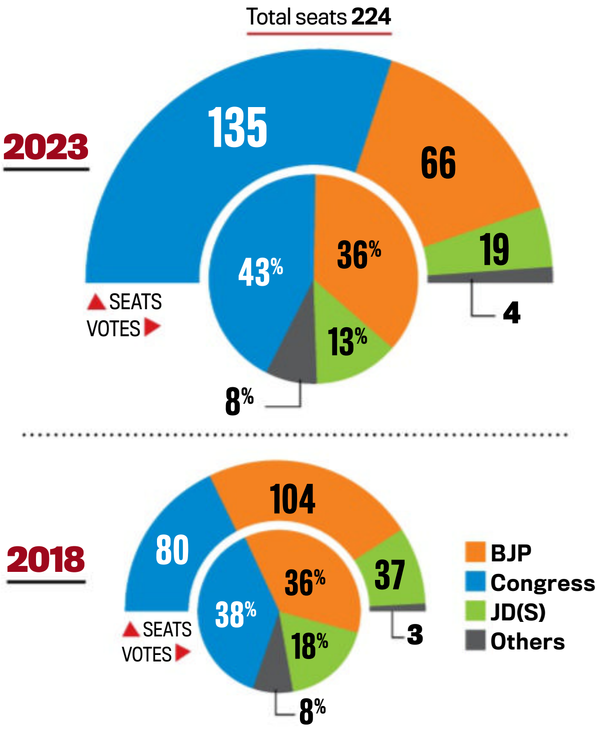
Randeep Surjewala's Art of Winning Elections seems to have taken a leaf out of Sun Tzu's playbook. The ancient Chinese general believed that "supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting". When the lanky Surjewala, 55, was made Congress general secretary in-charge of Karnataka in September 2020, he knew it would be an uphill task to defeat the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The state assembly election was just two and a half years away. So, he employed a tactic he had used in Narwana in Haryana in 2005 when, as a young MLA, he defeated veteran chief minister Om Prakash Chautala in the state election. "You erode your opponent's credibility to such an extent," he says, "that when he finally goes to the polls, he has already conceded defeat. For that, you must chip and chip away at them till they finally collapse."

Along with state leaders D.K. Shivakumar, the bearded and energetic 61-year-old president of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), and Siddaramaiah, the rustic but composed 75-year-old Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader who now gets a second stint as CM, Surjewala implemented an innovative strategy that involved playing on the front foot and keeping the opponent constantly on the defensive. It would defeat the mighty BJP in its southern bastion by a margin the Congress had not won since 1989 in the state. After the votes were counted, the Congress had won 135 of the state's 224 seats, 22 more than the 113 needed for a simple majority.

That figure has ensured the Congress government does not easily fall prey to poaching by the BJP. It has also massively boosted the party's efforts to win in states going to the hustings later this year. The objective will be

THE FINAL SCORE

Eating into JD(S)'s vote share, Congress added 55 seats over its tally in the previous election. BJP saw its seats drop by 38 even as it retained its vote share



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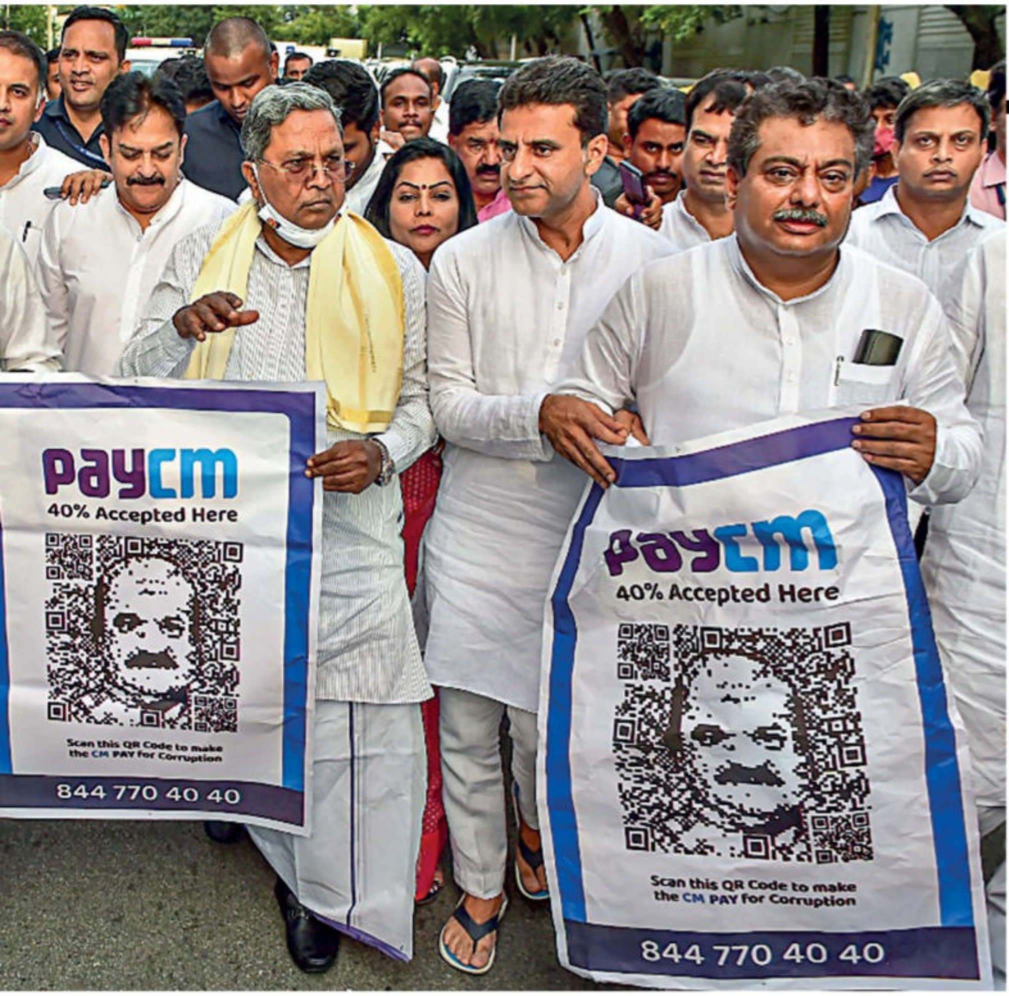
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WITH CATCHY CAMPAIGNS LIKE **PAYCM AND '40% COMMISSION SARKAR',** ALONG WITH QUIRKY BUT EFFECTIVE MESSAGING, THE CONGRESS MOUNTED A NARRATIVE FOCUSED ON LOCAL ISSUES

to retain Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and win back Madhya Pradesh, where it is the chief opponent of the BJP (*see accompanying story*). While the Congress may not be able to replicate the Karnataka model in these states, it holds many lessons for the party in the battles ahead. Here is the inside story of how the Congress pulled off a spectacular victory and what it means for the future.

LESSON 1: THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE VOTE

Unlike in the past, the Congress kicked off its campaign to win Karnataka almost two and a half years before the polls. In March 2020, six months before Surjewala was made state in-charge, the party high command appointed Shivakumar as the new KPCC president. A seven-time MLA, Shivakumar had a reputation of getting things done. Behind his image of being a hustler lay extreme tenacity and undiluted loyalty to the party, particularly to the Gandhi family. As though to herald a new start, one of the first things Shivakumar did was to renovate the dilapidated KPCC headquarters on Queens Road, giving it a facelift by adorning it with Greco-Roman pillars, an architectural style he seems particularly fond of, and speeding up the construction of a new state-of-the-art complex behind it.

Next, he revamped the party structure, choosing to adopt what a colleague calls "the Kamaraj Plan", as part of which every key leader was asked to head one key party organisation (see *The Congress A-Team*). Among them was Priyank Kharge, a former cabinet minister who looks a younger version of his father Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress national president. Priyank, who was made head of communications, speaks appreciatively of Shivakumar, saying, "Everyone had their task cut out and was monitored closely. His ability to work for the party relentlessly and make political manoeuvres requiring accurate intelligence was inspiring. He is better-wired than most of us."

With Surjewala coming on board, the KPCC gained a decisive edge. The affable Surjewala is a consensus-builder and a workaholic with a habit of holding meetings even at 3 am. He warned his team, "*Na sounga, na sone doonga* (won't sleep, won't let you sleep)." As the Covid crisis engulfed the state, the party proceeded to make its presence felt. Party MLAs and cadres were told to go out and help people, including purchasing food, vegetables and medicines and distributing them among the needy. As one of them reveals, "We were told to use all the 'resources' we had for social service." The party also highlighted the failures of the BJP government headed by B.S. Yediyurappa, the ageing Lingayat stalwart, in tackling the pandemic. The allegations that the chief minister had left much of the governance to his younger son, Vijayendra, who ran the show behind the scenes, helped.

Under pressure from the high command, Yediyurappa stepped down as chief minister in July 2021, while the pandemic was still raging, after a tenure of just two years. To ensure the continued support of the state's powerful Lingayat cohort, the BJP made Basavaraj Bommai, another Lingayat leader, the chief minister. With Bommai's clean image and reputation of being an able administrator, Surjewala realised they had a fight on their hands. "We need to hammer Bommai down before he becomes a giant; otherwise, we will be dead," he apparently told his team.

LESSON 2: CASH IN ON CORRUPTION

The opportunity to put Bommai on the mat presented itself months after he took over as chief minister. In November 2021, the Karnataka Contractors' Association released a letter it had written to the Prime Minister's Office in which it made the striking allegation that bills amounting to Rs 17,000 crore for government projects remained unpaid and complained of "rampant corruption", including having to pay bribes of up to 40 per cent to win tenders and get their bills passed.

> THE CONGRESS DECIDED THAT THE **BJP WOULD PLAY ON THE PITCH THAT IT LAID OUT.** IT BATTED ON THE FRONT FOOT

More was to follow. Another contractor, Santosh Patil, in a separate letter to the PMO, alleged that rural development minister K.S. Eshwarappa had demanded a 40 per cent commission from him to clear a bill worth Rs 4 crore for road construction undertaken in Belagavi the same year. Months later, in April 2022, Patil would die by suicide, but not before sending out a WhatsApp message to his friends blaming the minister for forcing him to take the step. Eshwarappa was forced to resign soon after.

Sensing the opportunity, Surjewala, who happened to be in the state for a party function, cancelled the event and asked Shivakumar and the local Congress MLAs to go down to Belagavi and meet Patil's widow, handing her a cheque of Rs 11 lakh from the party's coffers even as another MLA donated an additional Rs 5 lakh. The Congress then decided to

READING THE VOTE

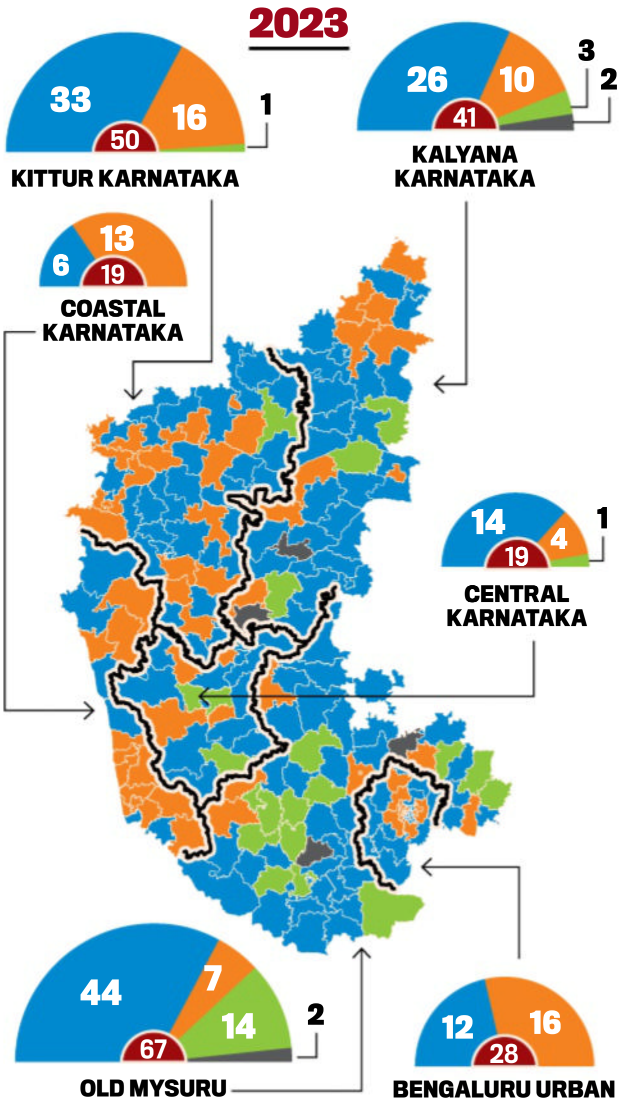
BOTH THE FINAL NUMBERS AND THE EXIT POLL REPORT THROW UP INTERESTING INSIGHTS ON HOW KARNATAKA VOTED

🟧 BJP 🟦 CONGRESS 🟩 JD(S) ⬛ OTHERS

REGION-WISE SEATS

THE ZONAL SPLIT

Barring Bengaluru Urban, the Congress improved its seat tally across Karnataka



Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

ANI

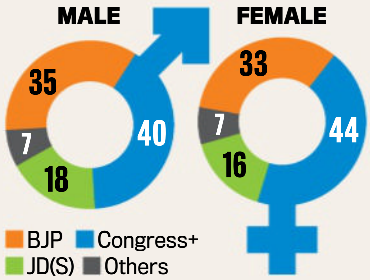
INDIA TODAY-AXIS MY INDIA EXIT POLL

HOW GENDER, AGE, CASTE, EDUCATION AND OTHER KEY FACTORS SHAPED THE VOTERS' CHOICE

GENDER-WISE VOTE SHARE

SEX FACTOR

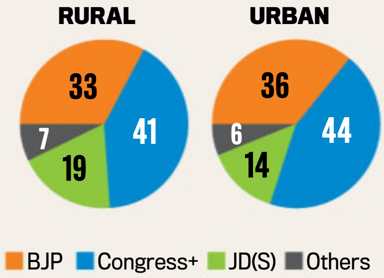
The Congress was the favoured party among both male and female voters



GEOGRAPHY-WISE VOTE SHARE

TOWN VS VILLAGE

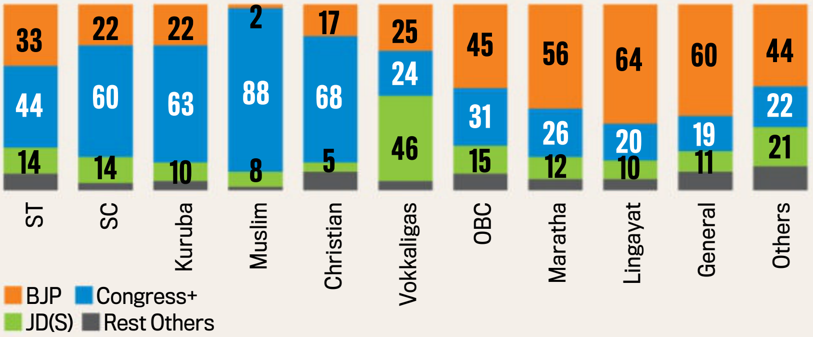
Both the Congress and the BJP polled better among urban voters; JD(S) fared better in rural areas



CASTE-WISE VOTE SHARE

SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

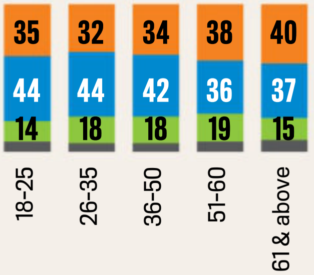
The minorities and other disadvantaged groups voted overwhelmingly for the Congress, the BJP held on to a large share of the vote from Lingayat, General and OBCs, while the JD(S)'s core Vokkaliga support showed resilience too



AGE-WISE VOTE SHARE

YOUTH LEND A HAND

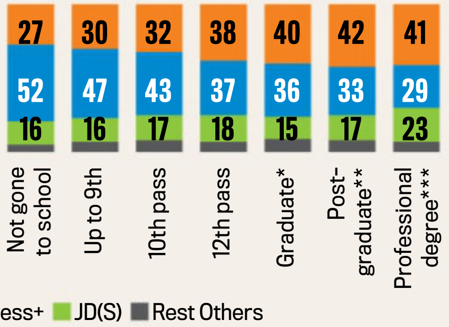
Older voters favoured the BJP; younger ones tilted the balance towards the Congress



EDUCATION-WISE VOTE SHARE

A MATTER OF DEGREE

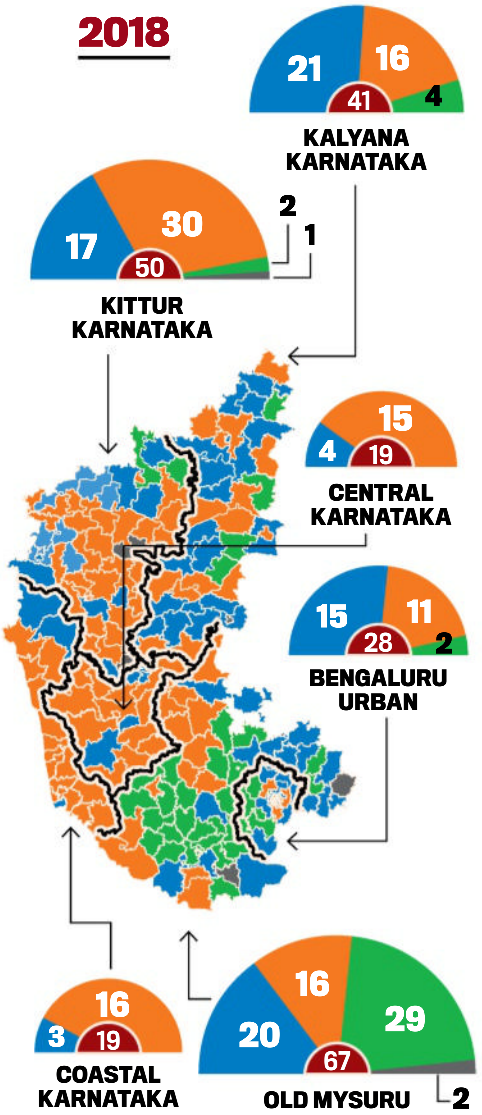
Overshadowed by the BJP among degree holders, the Congress polled much better when it came to the less educated voters



* Graduate: B.A., B.Sc., B.Com ** Postgraduate: M.A., M.Sc., M.Com., M.Phil., Phd

*** Professional degree: B.E., M.B.B.S., B.Tech., M.E., M. Tech, MBA

(All figures in %)


2018
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4
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KALYANA KARNATAKA
17
30
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1
50
KITTUR KARNATAKA
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15
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CENTRAL KARNATAKA
15
11
2
28
BENGALURU URBAN
3
16
19
COASTAL KARNATAKA
20
16
29
67
2
OLD MYSURU

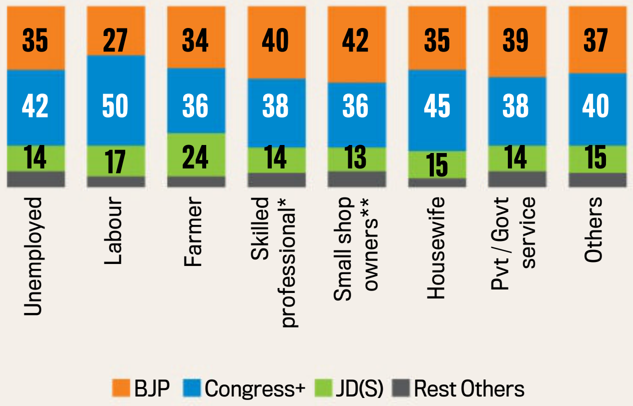
INDIA TODAY-AXIS MY INDIA EXIT POLL

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS THAT HELPED VOTERS DECIDE WHICH PARTY TO VOTE FOR

OCCUPATION-WISE VOTE SHARE

WHO GOT THE JOB DONE?

With the votes of farmers, small shop owners and the service class evenly divided, housewives, labourers and unemployed voters came to the Congress's rescue against the ruling BJP

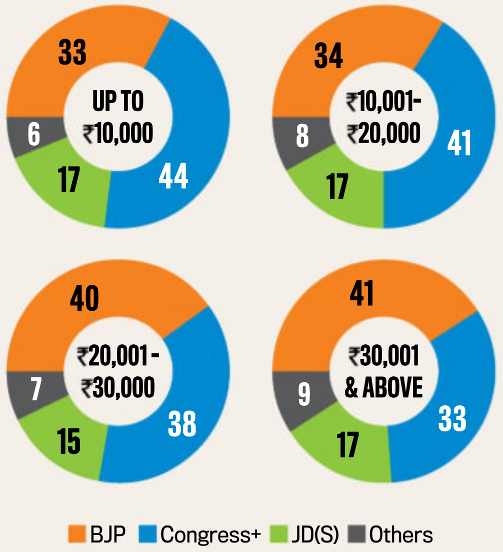


*Skilled professional: electrician/ plumber/ guide/ pandit/ technician/ carpenter **Small shop owner: tea stall/ paan shop/ salon/ dhaba/ roadside/ hawker/ vegetable-seller/ fruit-seller

FAMILY MONTHLY INCOME-WISE VOTE SHARE

EARNINGS AT PLAY

The Grand Old Party had the backing of the poorest sections of society—its vote share went up as the household income of the sampled voters slid

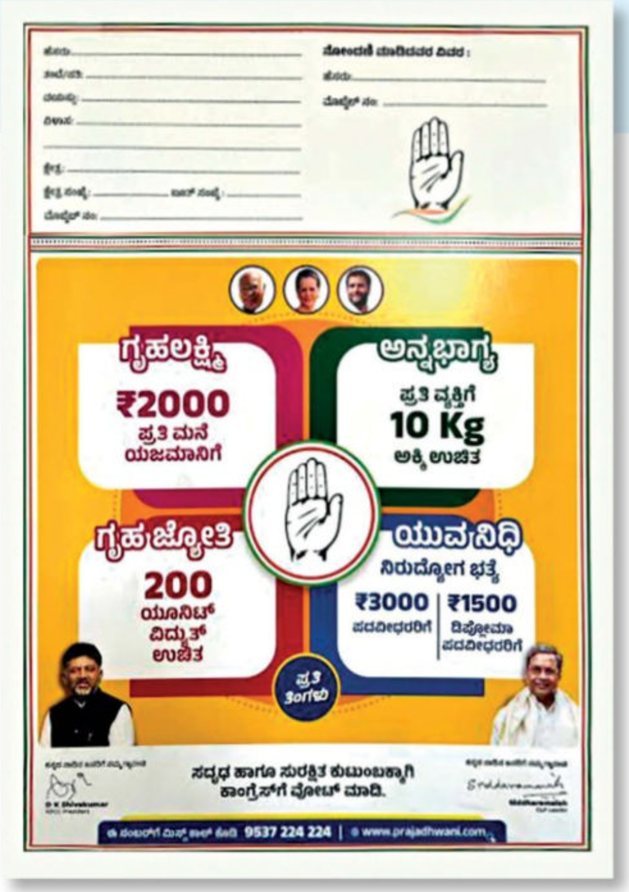


What was your reason for voting for a particular party in this assembly election?

■ TOTAL ■ BJP ■ CONGRESS+ ■ JD(S)

	TOTAL	BJP	CONGRESS+	JD(S)
Development of the state	36	41	34	32
Candidate for the constituency	14	13	12	18
Favourite party	11	11	13	7
Prime Minister Narendra Modi	7	19	-	-
In the hope of betterment/ change	7	1	10	9
The chief ministerial face	4	1	4	12
Inflation	4	-	9	2
The guarantees that Congress promised	4	-	9	-
Promises by the Janata Dal (Secular)	2	-	-	12
Benefits of state govt schemes	1	1	1	1
Law and order	1	1	1	1
Good work of the current government	1	3	-	-
Promises of the BJP	1	1	-	-
Others/ Don't know	7	8	7	6

(All figures in %)



MOST VOTERS IN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY **THE POOR, SEEMED HAPPY WITH THE CONGRESS'S GUARANTEES**. PER THE INDIA TODAY-AMI EXIT POLL, 10 PER CENT OF THOSE WHO VOTED THE CONGRESS CITED ITS WELFARE PROMISES AS THE REASON

make the war on corruption one of its main planks, especially as the Lokayukta unearthed another case in March 2023 in which BJP MLA K. Madalu Virupakshappa's son was caught allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 40 lakh on his behalf. A series of innovative social media campaigns was unleashed to ensure that the image of the BJP running a corrupt government stuck.

Two backroom boys played a key role in devising and executing the Congress campaign narrative—the 41-year-old reclusive and bespectacled Sunil Kanugolu, the party's superbright election strategist, and Sasikanth Senthil, 44, an earnest-looking former IAS officer who took premature retirement and joined the party and was made the All India Congress Committee war room in-charge. Kanugolu and his team came up with the catchy 'PayCM' campaign, '40% commission sarkar' slogan and also helped convert the Nandini vs Amul row into a matter of Kannada pride. Senthil deployed multi-media teams to come up with "quirky yet effective messaging" that would make the campaign even more impactful. Explaining the strategy, Senthil says, "Narratives do not get into people's minds if you do not communicate them properly. So, it was not only quirky ideas but also organisational support. We got the leaders, the followers, everybody to pitch in. A huge amount of organisational syncing happened to make it work."

In another tactic, Surjewala told Congress leaders not to directly level corruption charges against the government but quote others who complained, be it the contractors' association, teachers or even a Lingayat seer who castigated the Bommai government for the malaise. "We disowned the 'PayCM' brand midway and made the common man the owner," he explains. "That's what makes for ideal communication. When people own it, rather than the party." They even extended covert support to the hundreds of students protesting a scam in the recruitment for sub-inspector posts in Bengaluru, ensuring that no Congress flag was waved at Freedom Park where the protesters were sitting on a dharna. Accusations of multiple scams against the Bommai government in the past two years only made the Congress's job easier, with the party highlighting each example in telling detail.

LESSON 3: NAIL THE ANTI-INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE

Pradeep Gupta, founder of Axis My India (AMI), whose exit poll in collaboration with INDIA TODAY accurately predicted the results in Karnataka, outlines three main factors that determine the outcome in any election: *vaade* (promises), *daave* (claims) and *iraade* (intentions). *Daave*, says Gupta, are the claims the incumbent government makes about its performance and achievements, while *vaade* are the promises the challenger makes for better governance and new programmes. Based on the confidence levels the voters have either in the incumbent's achievements or in the opposition's promises, they express their intentions on the ballot paper. Gupta believes that for any ruling party to get re-elected, it needs to ensure that its performance remains above the the anti-incumbency threshold. With the BJP replacing its chief minister midstream, that very messaging weakened and governance began to falter.

That's when the Congress moved in for the kill. Feedback from internal surveys alerted the party to the fact that the voters, particularly those in the lower income groups and from scheduled castes and tribes, were hurting because of high prices and lack of steady income. So, in October 2022, when Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) entered Karnataka, the Congress leader was told to focus only on local concerns, especially discrimination against the poor. The yatra's assertions against inflation, unemployment, wealth disparity and the politics of hate, thus, dovetailed neatly with the Congress campaign within the state, helping the party win 16 of the 21 constituencies that BJY transited through.

The Congress believes the BJY campaign further eroded the credibility of the Bommai government and its handling of

THE CONGRESS A-TEAM

It takes many hands to win an election. The party leaders who helped tilt the scales

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE

The Congress president and former Karnataka CM contender himself, minutely managed the assembly poll in his home state

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA

The Congress general secretary campaigned extensively, holding 20-plus rallies and roadshows

K.C. VENUGOPAL

The AICC general secretary, organisation, and former AICC Karnataka in-charge played a key role in placating ticket aspirants who had rebelled. Because of his proximity to Rahul Gandhi, his words carried weight

RAHUL GANDHI

The Gandhi scion's Bharat Jodo Yatra had covered 21 constituencies in the state. The party won 16 of them

RANDEEP SURJEWALA

The AICC general secretary in-charge of Karnataka since 2020 sorted out differences between Siddaramaiah and DKS, apart from working out the nuts and bolts of the Congress strategy

prices and unemployment. The INDIA TODAY-AMI poll shows that inflation was one of the key reasons why the voters went with the Congress, along with the need for 'parivartan' or change of government. Having correctly gauged the mood of the people, the Congress, as Surjewala puts it, "had already fought the elections much, much before the actual dates for polling were announced." Bommai, on the other hand, was lulled into complacency by the mistaken belief that the 'labharthi' or beneficiary vote would accrue to the BJP given that the benefits of central and state welfare schemes reached close to 50 million of the state's 70 million people, and help the party romp to power. He was in for a rude shock.

LESSON 4: WOO THE COMMON WOMAN

While sticking to its negative messaging on the Bommai government, the core team decided to simultaneously present a positive agenda of hope, choosing to enter the welfare arena with a bang. In January, the party kicked off a Praja Dhwani Yatra (People's Voice March) in Belagavi and announced the first of its five guarantees if voted to power. Shivakumar, flanked by Siddaramaiah and other local leaders, announced Gruha Jyoti, a scheme in which the first 200 units of electricity consumed by a household would be free.

The two leaders then split up in the northern and southward direction and, travelling by bus, covered more than 170 of the state's 224 constituencies, raising local issues and concerns wherever they went. Backing them was a team of nearly 700 professional researchers stationed across the state's 31 districts, tuning in to streetcorner chatter as well as on local social media. They would compile daily pointers for leaders on issues they needed to bring up in every town or village they crossed, giving the party an intimate voter connect. Meanwhile, the Congress unfurled three more guarantees: Gruha Lakshmi, a Rs 2,000 monthly allowance for every woman head of the family; Anna Bhagya, doubling the free distribution of rice and other foodgrains for below the poverty line families to 10 kg; and Yuva Nidhi, a Rs 3,000 monthly allowance to unemployed graduates and Rs 1,500 for diploma-holders for two years.

To ensure every household was made aware of these guarantees, the party got Kanugolo to design them innovatively

THE CONGRESS DID **FALTER ON THE BAJRANG DAL/ BAJRANG BALI ISSUE**, BUT IT EVENTUALLY BACKFIRED ON THE BJP, SINCE THE MUSLIMS VOTED IN LARGE NUMBERS FOR THE CONGRESS

D.K. SHIVAKUMAR (DKS)

The Karnataka PCC chief, eight-time MLA and party's go-to troubleshooter. Led from the front and rejuvenated the party

M.B. PATIL

A topline Lingayat leader and Siddaramaiah confidant, the state campaign committee chief organised all the roadshows, public meetings and door-to-door campaigns in the state

SUNIL KANUGOLU

The poll strategist devised separate campaign strategies for each constituency. Also worked out campaigns on themes like PayCM etc. to corner the BJP

GOURAV VALLABH

The party national spokesperson led the fight in the TV debates, amplifying the 40% commission charge and *parivarvaad* in the BJP, pointing to 34 candidates in the fray

SIDDARAMAIAH

The former Karnataka CM and prominent backward class leader, along with DKS, led the poll campaign in the state

PRIYANK KHARGE

Kharge Sr's son and three-time MLA from Chittapur was a vital cog in bringing in the Scheduled Caste votes. As state communications in-charge, brought a local flavour to the campaign

SASIKANTH SENTHIL

The ex-IAS officer who joined the Congress in 2020 was in charge of the election war room. Also led the social media charge against the BJP

and print them with the signatures and photographs of Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, with space left for the voter's name and address. Senthil was then entrusted with the task of ensuring that they reached most of the households in the state. Among the methods he employed was to get together all aspirants in a particular constituency, divide the households among them and go door-to-door to hand over the cards. Senthil told them their chances of getting a ticket depended on their performance in this outreach. A separate mechanism and database were set up to check whether a household got the guarantee card. They revealed that an average of over 50 per cent of the households in each constituency were covered.

Key Congress campaigners were also told to emphasise in each speech that the guarantees would be implemented the day a Congress government was sworn in. Once the election was announced, the Congress added a fifth guarantee. Called Shakti, it promised free travel to all women in regular Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation and Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses. The BJP attacked the five guarantees, saying they would push the state into bankruptcy. The Congress claimed they would cost the exchequer around Rs 50,000 crore, or less than 20 per cent of the budgetary expenditure. The party promised to boost revenue generation to meet the additional expenses of the schemes.

Most voters in the state, particularly the poor, seemed happy with the guarantees. The INDIA TODAY-AMI exit poll showed that a high 10 per cent of those who voted for the Congress cited the party's welfare promises as the reason; the Congress's subregion-wise seat share was the highest in the state's poorest regions. The Congress also did exceptionally well among voters with income less than Rs 10,000 a month. With most of the Congress guarantees targeted towards women, the the number of women who voted for the Congress was 11 percentage points higher than for the BJP, as per the exit poll. Gupta says more than the common man, it was the common woman who favoured the Congress, and that became one of the main reasons for the party's spectacular victory. Even among males, the Congress vote was five percentage points higher than for the BJP.

LESSON 5: BREAKING THE CASTE BARRIER

The Congress was aware that to win a comfortable majority in Karnataka, it would require all communities on the caste spectrum to vote for it. In 2013, when the party had won a majority in the assembly, Siddaramaiah, who is from the Kuruba backward class, had revived a 1970s-vintage social compound called Ahinda, a catch-all Kannada acronym for a combination of the Alpasankhyataru or minorities, Hindulidavaru or backward classes, and Dalitaru or Dalits, who together constitute nearly 40 per cent of the state's population. What it needed to do this time was to also reach out to the two dominant communities—the Lingayats, who traditionally sided with the

BJP, and the Vokkaligas, who voted mainly for the Janata Dal (Secular) or the JD(S), the third force in the state that often played kingmaker (and, occasionally, king) with 30-40 seats.

The BJP stole a march when in October 2022, nearly seven months before the polls, the Bommai government promulgated an ordinance to increase reservations in employment and education for Scheduled Castes by 2 per cent and for Scheduled Tribes by 4 per cent. Then, in what Bommai described as a masterstroke, a day before the polls were announced, he scrapped reservations for Muslims and redistributed the four per cent thus freed among the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, in the hope that it would also strengthen the party's Hindutva vote.

Tinkering with reservations, AMI's Gupta will tell you, is fraught with danger for any government. The backlash this time came from the Other Backward Classes, who felt they had been left out in the whole process. Sections of the SCs, too, were aggrieved with the way the percentage reserved for them was redistributed among the four groups. An examination of the social group-wise support based on INDIA TODAY-AMI exit poll numbers shows that the Congress cornered a massive share of the Ahinda vote. The BJP won just 12 of the 36 SC seats and none of the 15 ST seats. The Congress, on the other hand, won 21 SC seats and 14 ST seats, respectively, up from the 12 SC seats and eight ST seats it won in 2018.

Meanwhile, having Shivakumar, a Vokkaliga, at the helm, helped fetch more votes from the community, to the detriment of the JD(S). He also made overtures across a traditional divide, making the powerful Lingayat leader M.B. Patil chairperson of the Congress campaign committee, thus helping the party secure the vote of the other dominant community. The BJP, on the other hand, had run into issues with its Lingayat base when it sidelined Yediyurappa and the party high command decided to drop senior leaders like Jagadish Shettar and Laxman Savadi. The party had wanted to bring about a generational change in its traditional Lingayat base and experiment with new faces to expand its Vokkaliga base. However, both these efforts met with limited success. The Congress made significant inroads into the BJP's Lingayat base with 34 MLAs from this community, even as the BJP's tally was reduced to 18.

LESSON 6: POLARISATION CAN GO ONLY SO FAR

Right through the election campaign, the Congress took care to focus on local issues. Its leaders were aware that with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its mascot, the BJP would try to shift the narrative towards national security and unity. Surjewala instructed party campaigners to stick to the agreed narrative and say "nothing sensational—no Adani, no Modi, no Ambani, not a word".

The Congress did slip at one point, when it mentioned the Bajrang Dal in the same breath as the Popular Front of India (PFI) as organisations that could be banned. That gave the BJP a chance to raise the familiar bogey of Muslim appeasement and Hindu-baiting. The party, and Modi in particular, went to town accusing the Congress of being anti-Hindu and against Hanuman or Bajrang Bali, a revered deity. 'Jai Bajrang Bali' became a rallying cry for the BJP, and, for a while, it seemed as though the Congress had yet again snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

It seemed to undo all the restraint the Congress had exhibited earlier. The Grand Old Party had, for instance, maintained a calculated silence when the hijab and halal controversies broke out last year. Leaders were told not to comment on the debate, leaving the Muslim community, which constitutes 13 per cent of the state's population, upset with the Congress for not taking a strong stand on the issue. The inclusion of Bajrang Dal in the manifesto this time was something key Congress leaders were well aware of. It was a balancing act the party was hoping to achieve since the BJP's campaign was forcing it to take a hard stand on the PFI. They thought they had couched it in vague enough terms, but the eagle-eyed BJP swooped on it nevertheless.

The Congress decided not to join issue with the BJP on the matter. Gaurav Vallabh, its articulate communications head, says, "When Modi talked of 91 *gaalis* and Hanuman Chalisa, we talked of 40 per cent commission of the BJP and our five guarantees." As it turned out, the issue backfired on the BJP

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RAHUL WAS INSTRUCTED TO TALK ONLY OF LOCAL ISSUES DURING THE KARNATAKA LEG OF THE BHARAT JODO YATRA. CONGRESS BAGGED **16 OF THE 21 CONSTITUENCIES** BJY WENT THROUGH

despite the party going hammer and tongs at the Congress. The INDIA TODAY-AMI exit poll showed that 88 per cent of the Muslims voted for the Congress and only eight per cent for the JD(S). It not only blew away the latter's vote and seat share, but also demonstrated the limits of BJP's polarising tactics. Surjewala showed a message he had received from a wit that said—"Final tally: Bajrang Bali 135, Bajrang Dal 66".

The Modi factor, though, did ensure that the BJP retained its overall vote share of 36 per cent. Gupta estimates that the PM's blitzkrieg in the final leg of the campaign gave the party an additional three per cent votes, preventing the Congress from getting a two-thirds majority. While the BJP may have ceded 38 seats from its tally in the previous state election, the story may well be quite different in the Lok Sabha polls next year. Voters have in the past elected one party to rule the state and another at the Centre.

LESSON 7: THE PARTY MATTERS THE MOST

Finally, what worked for the Congress in Karnataka was that it was able to transform itself into an electoral fighting machine that could give as good as it got or even better in the contest with the BJP. Wisely, the party decided to showcase local leaders and local issues in the state rather than swamp voters with Delhi stalwarts as the BJP had done. It also demonstrated a rare unity of purpose where even the two ambitious leaders, Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar, set aside their differences and worked as a team.

Congress president Kharge, who hails from north Karnataka, played as significant a role. The octogenarian has been in politics since the age of 24, a career spanning nearly 60 years. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of the party in every constituency and of every candidate. Neither Siddaramaiah nor Shivakumar could unduly push any of their candidates if Kharge disagreed. The homework and scrutiny were done much in advance. It was also a prestige battle for Kharge as the election was happening in his home state after he became party president last year.

Congress itself had prepared well too, coming out with 124 names in the first list a month and a half before the polls. Every candidate had been carefully screened, their advantages and handicaps assessed. Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar were made to speak to rebel candidates and then open the dialogue themselves. As a result, the final list came down from 40 rebels in the beginning to single digits. The party also divided the state into five zones and put each region under a working president—Ramalinga Reddy, Eshwar Khandre, Saleem Ahmed, Satish Jarkiholi and the late R. Dhruvanarayana—and an AICC secretary. Based on Kanugolu's eight-month survey that identified around 70 "touch and go" constituencies, the party deputed observers for each such seat. A core team comprising Kharge, Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Surjewala and K.C. Venugopal did the micro-management and monitored daily developments in the last mile of the campaign. They were supported by the strategic team of Kanugolu and Senthil, who handled communications. Senthil's team worked in sync with the national communications team led by Jairam Ramesh, Supriya Shrinate and Pawan Khera. He was also the inhouse fact-checker, providing leaders with content to attack and counter-attack the BJP on various issues. A special Quick Response Team or QRT dealt with all the emergencies. Its strong campaign on social media and elsewhere, in fact, was one notable distinction of the Congress strategy this time. "We made the BJP play on a pitch we laid out rather than theirs," says Surjewala. "We kept on top of the narrative and were always on the offensive. It shows that the BJP and its leaders, Modi and Shah, are not invincible if we get our act together." With a wry smile, he then adds, "If you win, all the mistakes are papered over, and you look so good." ■

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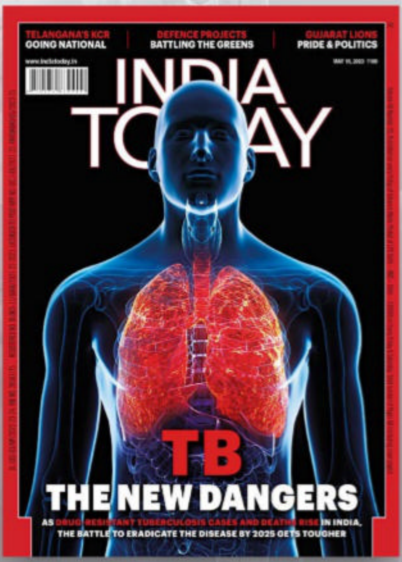
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COVER STORY

KARNATAKA

POWER CAMPAIGN (From left) Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge

ANI

READYING FOR FUTURE BATTLES

THE CONGRESS HOPES TO DO A KARNATAKA IN RAJASTHAN, MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH, STATES THAT ARE SCHEDULED TO GO TO THE POLLS LATER THIS YEAR. CAN THE PARTY REPEAT ITS MAGIC?

By **KAUSHIK DEKA** *with*
ROHIT PARIHAR *and* **RAHUL NORONHA**

Asked whether he would rebel if the high command doesn't make him the chief minister of Karnataka, Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar, on his way to Delhi on May 16, said that his primary concern was winning at least 20 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats from the state next year. The response could have been an attempt to evade giving a direct answer on the chief ministerial battle, but he rightly picked up the next big challenge, not just for his own party brass but also for rival BJP. The Grand Old Party expects to carry this momentum to 2024 when the Lok Sabha polls will be held, while the saffron party will hope to turn it around, again in its favour.

With 135 seats in the 224-seat assembly, the

ONCE UPON A TIME
Ashok Gehlot with Sachin Pilot (right)

ANI

Congress victory in Karnataka has been massive and has rejuvenated the party leadership and workers across India. This is the second such win against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP in less than six months—it won Himachal Pradesh in December 2022. Many within the party and outside have begun to see this as a revival of the Congress and decline of the Modi magic, which has helped the BJP win two consecutive Lok Sabha polls with massive mandates and form governments in several states as well. Even other Opposition leaders, including West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who were unwilling to yield the leading space to the Congress, have now changed tune, and have hinted at the possibility of joining hands with the Congress for a larger front against the BJP, provided the Congress allows the regional parties to lead in the regions where they are in command.

Such political inferences, however, don't enthuse Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. When reporters asked him if the Karnataka win was Modi's loss as the BJP had centred its election campaign around the prime minister, Kharge dismissed the question saying that this victory was about the state and not the Lok Sabha next year. The octogenarian politician, with nearly 60 years in active politics, understands that there are several battles to be won in the run-up to 2024. And such victories against the BJP in the state are not new. In the 57 state elections that it has contested since May 2014, the BJP has lost 29.

In 2018, the Congress won and formed governments in three states—Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh—that together account for 65 Lok Sabha seats. Yet, in 2019, it could win only three of these Lok Sabha seats, a repeat of its performance in 2014. It even lost its government in MP in 2020, after Jyotiraditya Scindia, peeved at being ignored for the post of chief minister, defected to the BJP along with 22 MLAs. These three states, where the Congress and the BJP are locked in bipolar contests, will go to the polls later this year. The Congress would be defending turfs in two of them—Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh—and will be the prime challenger in MP.

These battles in the states will not be easy for any of the parties as all of them face internal conflicts, anti-incumbency, imbalance in caste equations and corruption charges. The Karnataka victory of the Congress and the BJP's abysmal failure have demonstrated the key components that determine the difference between the winner and the loser—right narrative, strong leadership, deft handling of internal conflicts, social engineering and powerful communication. How the political parties work on these individual components is likely to determine the results of the electoral battles later this year in the three states.

> WHILE THE CONGRESS WAS CELEBRATING ITS KARNATAKA VICTORY, PILOT WAS LEADING A MARCH IN RAJASTHAN, HIGHLIGHTING **THE FAILURE OF THE GOVT OF HIS OWN PARTY** TO CURB CORRUPTION

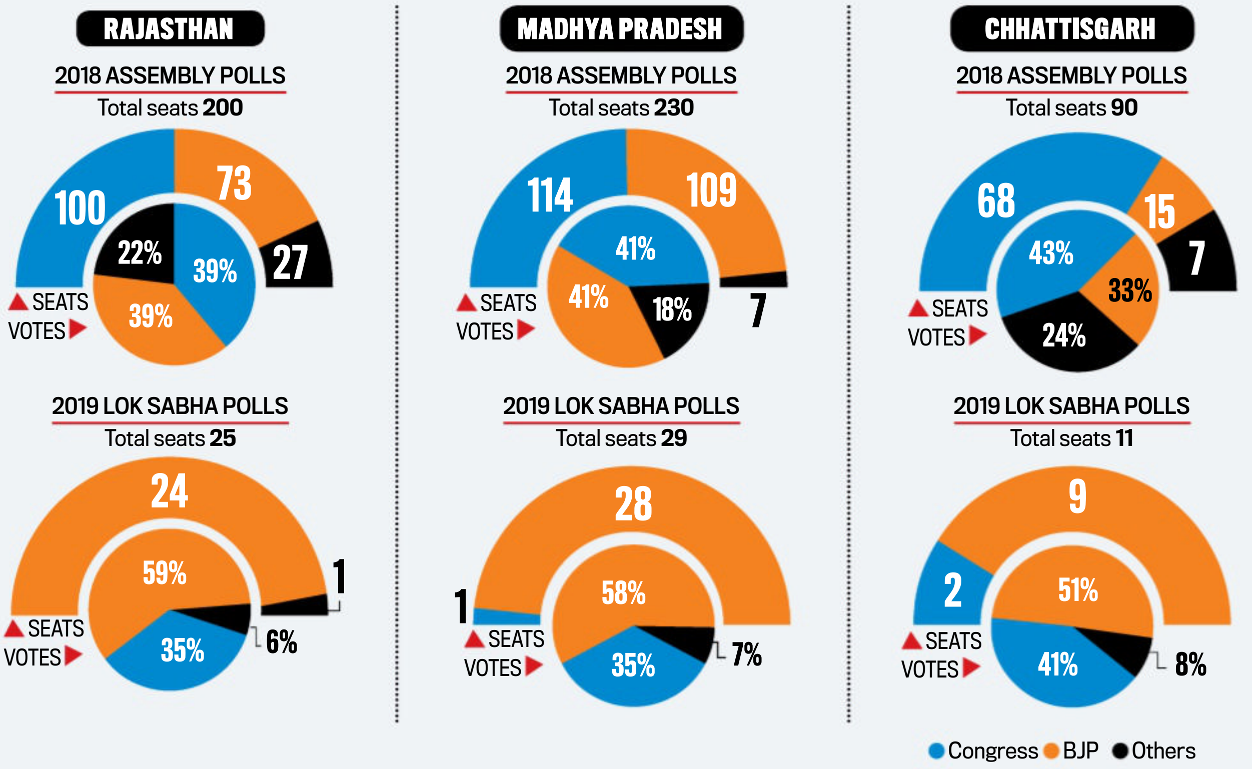
RAJASTHAN
Crisis of Leadership

This is one state where both the Congress and the BJP have been unable to successfully resolve the issue of leadership. Ever since Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot took oath in 2018, the ruling Congress has witnessed a bitter public feud between him and his former deputy, Sachin Pilot. Even when the party was celebrating its Karnataka victory, Pilot was leading a march in Rajasthan, highlighting the failure of the government of his own party to curb corruption, and recruitment test paper leaks. On May 16, the march culminated in Jaipur with his aide, minister Rajendra Singh Gudha, accusing his own government of surpassing the outgoing '40 per cent' BJP *sarkar* in Karnataka. Ironically, it was the Congress campaign against the alleged corrupt practices under BJP rule in the southern state that caught the fancy of the voters.

However, despite Pilot's rebellion, Gehlot has kept a firm grip on the party, with most MLAs backing his leadership. That's one reason why the party high command has not yet yielded to Pilot's demand to make him the CM. Gehlot is now banking on his welfare schemes—he regularly monitors

THE THREE BIG FIGHTS

Though the Congress won Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the **2018 assembly elections**, the party's fortunes saw a reversal in the **2019 Lok Sabha polls,** with the BJP almost making a clean sweep in all three states. The challenge for the Congress is to arrest the BJP's superlative performance in the Lok Sabha polls where votes are sought in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For the BJP, the key questions is: Will the Modi magic work again?



Graphic by ASIT ROY

their implementation—and his acceptability across all caste groups to help him return to power and change the course of history. Since 1998, the Congress and the BJP have been swapping power every five years—it was the Congress that won 100 seats against the BJP's 73 in the 200-member House the last time. If Gehlot wants to buck this trend, he must have an answer to counter the Gujjars rallying for Pilot, who is from this community. The state's eight Gujjar MLAs—all in the Congress—are split equally between Gehlot and Pilot. Gehlot is now trying to bring to his fold anti-Gujjar castes, including Mali, which he belongs to, and Meena, a Scheduled Tribe in eastern Rajasthan.

Pilot's campaign has embarrassed Gehlot as the BJP tried to make corruption in his government a big issue. Pilot accuses Gehlot of ignoring the corruption charges against his predecessor Vasundhara Raje of the BJP. Some in the BJP are secretly expressing happiness over Pilot's move as they don't want Raje to lead the BJP in the state again. She is also said to be out of favour with the RSS. In fact, there are half a dozen CM aspirants in the BJP. But the central leadership is gradually inclining towards Raje for a comfortable win. The party replaced hardcore anti-Raje RSS man Satish Poonia as state president with milder C.P. Joshi—who is not from an RSS background. But the challenge now for the central leadership is to make peace between second-rung leaders and Raje by suggesting that she will be removed in the fourth year if she does not perform. As the Congress did in Karnataka, the BJP also needs to keep its house united and combat the Gehlot government on local issues, instead of depending on the Modi magic to see them through.

> THE CONGRESS'S **LEADERSHIP ISSUE IS SETTLED** IN MADHYA PRADESH. KAMAL NATH IS THE CM FACE AND HE SHARES A GREAT RAPPORT WITH EX-CM DIGVIJAYA SINGH

MADHYA PRADESH

A Problem Called Chouhan

For the Congress, the leadership issue is settled this time in Madhya Pradesh. Kamal Nath is the CM face and he shares a great rapport with former CM Digvijaya Singh, who played a crucial role in the party winning the elections in 2018. The two have been working in sync till now, and the party's electoral campaign will mostly revolve around the 'misgovernance' of the Shivraj Singh Chouhan regime. Caste calculations are also being kept in mind as the party has set up various cells based on professions to build an inclusive vote bank. The induction of Sunil Kanugolu, the election strategist behind the Karnataka win, is also expected to provide a fillip to the Congress campaign.

However, the job may not be easy. Unlike Karnataka, where there is a change of government every five years, the BJP had an uninterrupted 15 years in power in MP between 2003 and 2018. Even in 2018, when the Congress did unseat the BJP, it was by a narrow margin—the BJP won 109 seats and the Congress 114 in the 230-member House.

The saffron party also has a stalwart in the form of Chouhan, though there are murmurs within the party that his popularity is on the wane. Speculation is rife that the central leadership is not keen to continue with him. What makes the BJP's case weaker is that state unit chief V.D. Sharma has failed to show much organisational expertise, forcing the top leadership to dither any decision on the CM face. Besides, the weakening of the local leadership may backfire on the party, as was seen in Karnataka. "The success of the BJP's central leadership can be the icing on the cake, but the cake has to be prepared locally," says political analyst Sandeep Shastri while referring to the BJP's oft-repeated slogan of 'double-engine sarkar'—BJP rule both at the Centre and in the state.

IN CHHATTISGARH, THE CONGRESS HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTING HOW THE BAGHEL GOVT PAID **BONUSES FOR PADDY PROCUREMENT**

Earlier indications suggest that the BJP may fall back on polarising narratives to win back the state. A day after the Karnataka results, Chouhan mentioned the recent arrests of members of the radical outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir from Bhopal and raised the issue of conversion. At the same time, it has not lost focus on social engineering. The BJP has been carrying out an outreach programme among numerous caste-based groups in its bid to build a social coalition. Community-specific welfare boards have been announced in addition to declaration of holidays to commemorate the birthdays of community leaders.

CHHATTISGARH

Selling Sops and Soft Hindutva

This tribal-dominated state has been the strongest citadel of the Congress. In 2018, the party returned to power in Chhattisgarh after a hiatus of 15 years, winning a thumping majority, securing 68 seats of the total 90 and reducing the BJP to 15. Like Rajasthan, here too, the Congress has witnessed a bitter power tussle between Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and his cabinet colleague T.S. Singh Deo. While Baghel, an OBC leader, has a strong grip over the organisation and has the support of most of the MLAs, Singh Deo holds sway over the tribal seats in North Chhattisgarh. Peace between the two leaders is imperative if the Congress wants to put up a united front and that is where the central leadership's challenge lies.

In terms of narrative, the Congress has been highlighting how the Baghel government paid bonuses for paddy procurement and also adopting a soft Hindutva stand, raising issues such as procurement of cow dung, promotion of organic farming and development of the Ram Van Gaman Path (the route Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman are believed to have taken during their exile). The focus on electoral gain is evident as all the policies, schemes and finances are directed towards the central region of the state, where 65 or so of the state's 90 assembly segments are located.

For the BJP, former CM Raman Singh remains the most celebrated face. Though the party has not groomed any leader to take over Singh's legacy, it is trying to downsize the influence of the former CM. Late last year, the national leadership changed both the party president and the leader of the Opposition, considered close to Singh. Bilaspur MP Arun Sao, who hails from the politically crucial Sahu community, was made party president while Narayan Chandel, an OBC leader, was appointed the leader of the Opposition. The party has also brought in veteran Om Mathur as Chhattisgarh in-charge, which seems to have given the impression that it is serious about the state. But the recent exit of Nand Kumar Sai, the BJP's most towering tribal leader, seems to have weakened the party's pitch on the tribal turf. Sai joined the Congress.

As far as electoral issues are concerned, the BJP has been claiming that the Baghel government has failed to deliver the benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana to the residents of the state. Also, if the alleged corruption against the BJP government contributed to the party's loss in Karnataka, it should worry the Congress in Chhattisgarh as well. The Enforcement Directorate has arrested an IAS officer and a party MLA on charges of corruption. ■

Leading mindful transformation

HSO, the transformation company, found the able hands of Prabhat Nagaraj to steer its foray into India and the Philippines. Already well-established globally, Prabhat's experience and reputation played a huge role in building the brand in Asia. He discusses taking ownership, and leading by example.

Prabhat Nagaraj
Managing Director, HSO, India & Philippines

Currently the Managing Director for HSO India & Philippines, Prabhat Nagaraj has a veritable experience across his illustrious career. He spent almost 20 years in the USA where he led diverse teams across various organisations such as Microsoft, Hitachi, DXC, Amazon and RSM. He started his career as a consultant and grew into a leadership role at Hitachi where he was the Vice President for the Americas. His ability to provide solutions saw him evolve into a role where he managed the entire Microsoft Dynamics services team in DXC Americas. His reputation preceded him before he took up his current role in India.

RINGING IN THE RIGHT CHANGE

"I knew it would be challenging, but it was also in many unexpected ways," says Prabhat, about transitioning into his current role. The first few months of Prabhat's stint at HSO saw him playing an active role in ensuring the right talents were working on the right projects.

Prabhat believes that every individual intends to do their best, and that is why they show up to work. If, for some reason, they find themselves unable to achieve their professional goals, Prabhat is the kind of leader who starts by identifying the cause. "It is my responsibility to provide the right opportunity for every individual, and ensure that person feels good about doing the job they set out to do in the first place," he says.

Prabhat takes a keen interest in the humans behind the employees, understands their needs and aspirations, and has transformed many careers for the better. He also believes that the more an individual grows, the more the organisation grows, and therefore so does an entire industry.

"NEVER TOO LATE TO ACQUIRE SKILLS"

"I was not born with them, most of them have been acquired" says Prabhat, as he talks about some of the most valuable skills he has honed in the diverse roles he has held. As a young consultant, he found there was a need to constantly 'do'. He worked with one of the top leaders in the industry back then, and began to notice that even in the event of a conflict, the latter would do nothing. Sometimes, to the point that the lack of action would frustrate Prabhat. Slowly, a lesson unfolded. He came to realise that even when something wrong was happening, the best action may not necessarily be to 'take action'. "The fact that you do not act, is an act in itself," he says.

TRANSFORMING WORK WITHIN

Prabhat's role as Managing Director for HSO's operations in India and the Philippines started right in the middle of the pandemic. In a short span of time, Prabhat has led necessary policy changes for safe and inclusive hiring practices, a hybrid work culture, benefits that include insurance for the individual and their families, and also the opportunity to upskill.

Today, when professionals are hired at HSO, they are proactively given a career path. Not only are they provided with the right mentorship, but also with the right resources to upskill in their chosen fields of work. "I want to inspire people to be their best everyday," says Prabhat.

Prabhat is optimistic about his current role. Over the course of his career, his roles required him to develop a microscopic look into understanding what went into making large teams function, and the challenges that came with it. He continues to achieve a consistent symbiosis between technology and individuals. As someone who believes in the union of individuals and the organisation by a vision, Prabhat is truly a leader to reckon with.

LANDMARK – THE NAME SAYS IT ALL

PANKAJ LIDOO
Managing Director, Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd.

Screws or fasteners are the smallest part in any assembled product. Their size belies their importance. Every assembled product requires a fastener in order to ensure a safe and strong final construction. One Indian entrepreneur identified the importance of this small yet versatile product to build an empire that laid the foundation for the nation to become self-sufficient.

In the late 90's, colour coated sheet profiling trend was picking up in India. The concept of self-drilling screws was nonexistent and it used to be imported. Pankaj and Vipin Lidoo established a company to import screws from Taiwan under the brand name **HP**® which is a registered trademark of the company.

Blessed with tremendous foresight and ambitious by nature, they spend a lot of energies and investments on research and development to enhance their expertise enough to start developing these products in India itself. As a result, they were the first Indian company to manufacture screws within the country.

Pankaj and Vipin worked tirelessly to achieve this goal. They often visited Taiwan to understand the manufacturing technology of screws. Having learnt the intricacies of the process, they imported the machines to set up the manufacturing unit for self-drilling screws. Joining hands with their Taiwanese partner resulted in a symbiotic exchange of ideas and technologies, resulting in a stupendous growth for Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd. Pvt Ltd to emerge as a pioneer and a market leader in its segment.

Not content with a strong market presence, Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd. is focussing on improvising and expanding its product range. Broadly there are three different kinds of products such as self-drilling screws, aluminum blind rivets and lastly dry-wall screws. However, the application of self-drilling screws has increased drastically, extending itself to the smallest of products. So the company is geared to help the industry with different types of screws or fasteners, designed specifically for different kinds of applications and mediums. Their future project involves screws for concrete walls.

Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd. has state-of-the-art factories with three units. These sophisticated production units are the major USP of our company. An ISO 9001:2015 accredited company, it is also rated SME-1 by CRISIL & is accredited by D&B D-U-N-S Number: 86-391- 8674. With these proven, superior quality manufacturing facilities, they are capable of tackling the rising challenges in the field in most effective ways.

Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd. has a pan India presence with close to 10-11 marketing offices in different cities of the country. Future plans include opening up units across the country to cater to industries in an effective and efficient manner. They are focusing on innovation to expand the product range and increasing production to cover up the gap between demand and supply.

With a country as diverse as India, the customer demand is different at each and every location and so their application too is different, because we are a geographically diverse country. In Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, the applications are mostly wood based, whereas in the south, there is a need for products that are anti-corrosive considering the salt-laden humidity. Landmark Crafts Pvt. Ltd. customize the products to ensure that the customer's needs are perfectly met. That is the real secret behind their success in retaining the brand value and reputation. Just attribute it to their quest for perfection.

With a roster of prestigious clients like BHEL, Railways and DMRC with whom they enjoy long standing relationships, their credentials are impeccable. It is no surprise that the company that started supplying Delhi Metro, is now the vendor of choice to metro projects all over the country. For a company that is committed to achieve client's satisfaction by consistently meeting specific requirements and timely delivery by diligently following a process of continued training and adoption of new technology, setting Landmarks is a routine, we suppose.

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YOUR LOVE FOR THE CITY

Narendra Firodia
Humanitarian First. Entrepreneur Next.

Narendra Firodia

The Firodia family has had a legacy of serving the people. Spiritual in their approach to life, they have held a belief that they should serve and help people.

The late Kundanmaji Firodia was the first lawyer from the Oswal community in Ahmednagar and a staunch Gandhian. Post-independence, he served as a speaker for the Bombay Assembly too. His son the Late Motilalji Firodia founded The Ahmednagar District Central Co-operative Bank, which has grown to become Asia's largest Co-operative Bank. He also served as a Member of Parliament, representing Ahmednagar, turning down the nomination for the next term to devote his time for social causes and betterment of Ahmednagar. He also founded Namoha Foundries, a leading cast iron foundry in the state.

The 3rd Generation, the Late Shantikumarji Firodia expanded the vision with his special interests in Accountancy, Taxation, Business & Sports. Shantikumarji was an Educationist, Sports Player and Philanthropist who believed that hard work and passion helped attain great success. People looked up to him as an inspiration for his principles of being self-reliant and a consistent contributor to the betterment of the society.

Narendra Firodia is the chip of the old block, advancing the vision of his illustrious family, expanding the scope of their efforts for the betterment of the people and society as a whole. He says, "I truly believe that money, power & knowledge are great assets if used with compassion". Along with his wife he provides aid to the people, especially through education, medical, sports and cultural activities. Their family trust assists in improving healthcare infrastructure, education and the rehabilitation of abandoned women and children.

Verse 20-21 of Chapter 3 of Bhagavat Gita says, "By performing their prescribed duties, King Janak and others attained perfection. You should also perform your duties to set an example for the good of the world. Whatever actions great persons perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set, all the world pursues." While it aptly defines them, the 4th Generation Scion, hasn't deviated one bit.

Heading the Narendra Firodia Unicorp, his domain expertise extends across diverse industries like Telecom, Healthcare, Hospitality, Infotainment, Real Estate, Web Platforms/ Mobile Applications and Sports. More than all this, it is Narendra's identity as a Social Entrepreneur that shines through.

Narendra is empowering the Real India by fuelling start-ups in the tier 2 and tier 3 cities. He inculcates the budding leaders of tomorrow to pursue their passion and help build India into a superpower. His "I LOVE NAGAR" is India's first city centric application to empower the voice of the common people of Ahmednagar and ensure it reaches the right change makers. The application strengthens the development of the city with suggestions from its people and gives everyone the convenience of contributing to the growth of their beloved city.

Narendra believes that Corporate Social Responsibility is an integral part of the Firodia Family legacy. The principle of giving back to the society has run in the family and he is continuing the tradition through the Shantikumarji Firodia Memorial Foundation. His philanthropic work, providing quality education and good medical healthcare to the underprivileged, have earned the foundation and him a lot of accolades and recognition.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

2017	Lokmat Business Icon of Ahmednagar
2018	Lokmat Vishwakarma - Eminent Builders of Maharashtra
2019	Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad - 'Karyakarta Puraskar'
2020	New York PressAgency - 500 most influential people in India
2020	IFIE (InteractiveForum of Indian Economy) - "Champions of Change Maharashtra"
2020	Times "Man of the Year" for Philanthropy
2021	Forbes India - "Icon of Excellence"
2021	A Rare Distinction. Got a Commendation Badge from Indian Army - South Western Command.
2022	Featured in the Economic Times as a Newsmaker Achiever.
2022	Featured in India Today as and amongst The Best of India'.

He says, *"What you leave behind is not what is engraved on stone monuments, but what is intricately woven into the lives of others. This eventually becomes the cornerstone of our DNA, our heritage, our pride".*

Spoke like a True Leader, we say.

Archana Suresh Kute – Leader Extraordinaire

In today's world, women are breaking barriers and achieving success in all fields, and the business world is no exception. One such inspiring woman is Archana Suresh Kute, who is making waves with her exceptional leadership and management skills, as well as her philanthropic work and advocacy for women's empowerment.

Archana Suresh Kute

The Kute Group is an Indian Conglomerate comprising 50+ companies operating in diverse business sectors/ industries. Started by the Late Shri. Dnyanobarao Kute, it was nurtured by his son Suresh Kute into a multidimensional multi-million business cluster.

a was encouraged by her family and her husband Suresh to take over the mantle of the group. Delivering impressive growth of the company, she has successfully metamorphosed into a source of motivation for women who aspire to grow and transform their lives.

Archana's actions and business acumen has steered The Kute Group to the next level. The dynamic woman entrepreneur strongly believes in the brand ideology, "Keeping Mankind Happy", striving to ensure products and services offered by the organization deliver complete customer satisfaction and improve the quality of life.

Archana encourages employees to share their thoughts and ideas freely and provides a safe and open environment for discussion. Regular team meetings are organized to share and exchange views and insights; tasks are delegated, ensuring everyone has clear goals and responsibilities, recognizes their achievements, and appreciates their hard work, etc., at the organization.

Archana also steers the "Kute Group Foundation" which focuses on solving social, economic, and environmental-related issues. The Foundation actively participates in a range of charitable endeavors. These include distribution of food items, clothes, water, bicycles, sewing machines, and other essential items to needy people. It helps economically underprivileged children in education and contributes to orphanages and various relief activities. By distributing a large number of food packs to underprivileged people in Beed everyday, it tries to alleviate the hunger and food insecurity that many people in the region face. The Foundation has contributed significantly towards environmental sustainability by planting trees.

Archana is a big advocate of women's empowerment. She believes that women have the potential to achieve great things, if given equal opportunities and support. She opines that every woman has the ability to do anything they want to do if they have family support. And that the best way to bring this talent forth is to educate, empathize and mentor them so that they can trust their capability. She has initiated a significant approach towards empowering women by providing life-changing opportunities to 400+ women from Beed's rural areas and giving them the courage to work in a corporate environment. Thanks to her efforts and support, women from rural areas are stepping out of their homes to create an identity for themselves. She is encouraging the women in her company to strive for excellence to achieve their potential in leadership roles.

Archana has earned numerous prestigious awards and accolades due to her exceptional contributions to the community and significant role in empowering women.

INTERNATIONAL

- BlackSwan Award for Women Empowerment 2021-22 (AsiaOne/URS Media)
- Inspiring Woman Entrepreneur Award 2022 (Dubai)
- Blackswan Award For Women Empowerment 2020-2021 (AsiaOne/URS Media)
- Globoil Asia Women Entrepreneur Of The Year 2020 (Colombo, Sri Lanka)

NATIONAL

- Maharashtra Udyog Bhushan Puraskar 2022
- Sakal Idols Of Maharashtra 2022 Award
- Woman Icon Of The Year 2022 Award
- Featured in Outlook Business Magazine 2022
- Felicitated As A "Covid Yodhha Udyojak"
- Recognized as Business Women Of The Year 2021
- Featured in Business Today Magazine
- Lokshahi Pune Ratna Award 2021
- Idol Of Women Entrepreneurs Award 2021
- Featured in "Top 10 Women Leaders in FMCG 2021" Magazine
- Times Power Women West India 2020 by Times Group, India
- Featured in "Women Entrepreneur India" Magazine
- Featured in "Fortune India Exchange" as Influential Entrepreneurs

Archana Kute's story is a testament to the power of women in leadership roles.

Aryen Suresh Kute: Master of the Game

India's youth is driving a new era of entrepreneurship, boosting the start-up ecosystem, and creating more job opportunities. Some of India's most successful business talents are still in their teens, proving that a determined spirit and creative thinking can achieve incredible things. Aryen Suresh Kute, Founder & CMD, OAO INDIA stands out as the perfect representative of this generation, achieving enviable milestones and received prestigious awards, honours and recognition at a very young age.

Master Aryen Suresh Kute

Aryen Suresh Kute, like children of his age, enjoyed playing different genres of mobile games. And like other parents, Suresh Dnyanobarao Kute (Chief Managing Director – The Kute Group) and Archana Suresh Kute (Managing Director-The Kute Group), were not thrilled with his habits. To their delight, Aryen met with resistance innovatively. He turned the passion for gaming into a business. His brainchild, OAO INDIA, today creates entertaining, awesome games that all age groups can play, globally.

Aryen knew it would be a challenging journey. He spent a year building a strong team and infrastructure in the gaming industry, with the help of his supportive parents. Today, OAO INDIA has become a prominent name in the gaming industry, and its games have gained popularity among players of all ages.

OAO Info India's journey started in 2019. With four games already released, it has captured the attention of gamers of all ages. Their debut game, Krishna Makhan Masti (KMM), is a Puzzle Bubble Shooting Game, based on the beloved character of Lord Krishna. The second game, Indian Food Baash (IFB), is a Match-3 Food Puzzle Game, and the third game, Rise of Warr (ROW), is a Strategic Card Game based on a fictional mythological war. The fourth game, WarZone: The Soldier, is an Action-Packed Soldier Game where you play as Captain Roy, the elite soldier on a mission to shoot down enemies. The team is all set to launch its newest game, an endless runner game named School Time. Besides game development, OAO Info India also provides customized web design, development services, and expert digital marketing services.

His dedication to his vision and commitment to creating games that are enjoyable by all age groups set him apart. Aryen's success has been recognized with prestigious awards, including The Leader Behind an Admirable Company 2022 Award (India), 40 Under 40 Most Influential Leaders 2021-22 (International), The Economic Times Most Influential Leaders 2022 Award (India), The Best Leadership Of The Year 2022 Award (India), Youth Icon in Gaming and Web development 2022 (Dubai), and Sakal Yuva Sanman Award 2022 (India).

Optimistic about gaming and his company, Aryen plans to expand his user base globally and nationally. He and the team are working on exciting projects such as multiplayer 3D games and exploring different game genres. They're also building an Indian version of a battle royale game. Looking ahead, Aryen believes that Metaverse will take the gaming industry to the next level, and he and his team are already working on it to forge a path and define the future.

Aryen Suresh Kute, is more than just a successful young entrepreneur. He is also a philanthropist who believes in giving back to society. With his dedication and vision, the future looks bright for OAO INDIA and the Indian gaming industry.

Beacon Group – A Rising Tiger in Annuity based Financial Services

Founded by Mr. Pratapsingh Nathani, an ex-Investment Banker, backed with more than two decades of experience across an array of financial products and stints at premier financial services groups including ING Bank, has built out a group of companies based on annuity businesses across many products within a short span of 6 years. Regulated annuity-based business models like Trusteeship, Fund Administration, Fund Accounting, Payroll Management, BFSI SaaS are extremely challenging business models to build out simultaneously as it takes decades to build credibility in such businesses.

Pratapsingh Nathani
Founded of Beacon Group

The group incorporated its first venture, Beacon Trusteeship with a license from SEBI in 2016. The Trustee business has become the group's flagship entity, has risen to rub shoulders with the global leaders in the business in such a short span of time, talks volumes about its domain expertise brought about by an illustrious, experienced management team. Its core product offerings include Debenture Trusteeship, Security Trusteeship, Securitization Trusteeship and Alternative Investment Funds (AIF) Trusteeship, Escrow Trustee, Deposit Trustee, ESOP Trustee & Document Safe Keeping to a growing roster of clients that reads like a who's who of the corporate world. They now boast of an Assets under Administration (AuA) of US$ 180 Bn with more than 850+ Corporate Clients and 150+ AIFs in India & the IFSC GIFT City, without any regulatory & statutory strictures since inception. By combining their capabilities and in-depth knowledge, they offer best-in-class services that are at par with global standards and practices. In a short span of time of 5 years, they have ranked in the Top 3 Debenture Trustees by PRIME DATABASE in terms of transaction volumes in the last 3 years. In FY22-23, they topped the charts in Public Sector Issuances and Bond IPO issuances.

Beacon is guided by industry luminaries like Mr. Surindersingh Kohli, exCMD of India Infrastructure Finance Co (IIFCL) & exCMD of Punjab National Bank (PNB), Mr. D R Dogra exCMD, CARE Ratings, Mr. Satish Kalani exVP, Tata Chemicals, Mr. Ashok Motwani exCGM, IDBI Bank, Mr. Sanjay Sinha, exMD & CEO, Axis Trustee, Mr. Sanjay Bhasin, an eminent Banker who has worked across multiple geographies like UK, West Africa & India and Mr. Vasan Paulraj, ex MD – Private Equity at Axis Capital.

While building the Trustee business, there was great demand for Fund Services from its AIF clients so they started Kratos Capital Advisors with specialization in Fund Administration, Accounting Services & Compliance Services to AIFs, PEs and VCs. The company's Asset under Accounting (AuA) stands at US$ 3 Bn. The company also provides full suite service like Contributor Onboarding/servicing, reporting & portfolio management & Tax compliances

The group also ventured out into a phygital (physical + digital) loan aggregation platform for SME Loans, called LoanXpress.com, providing debt solutions to small & mid-sized corporates in India. Bespoke debt solutions are provided by the team to boost their growth which includes advising corporates for Working Capital & Supply Chain Finance, Structured Trade Finance and Business Loans. The company acts as loan aggregator for Financial Institutions and represents MSME, SME & Mid Corporate Borrowers to 40+ Lenders NBFCs & banks. The annual throughput is close to a billion dollars with about 2500 Cr of loans being arranged last year.

While building out these businesses, Beacon has always focused on technology as one of the founding pillars in its growth. Codium Techlabs was founded as a SaaS based outfit to build the technology-based systems like ERP, Securitization platform, Covenant Monitoring Platform. There is a collaborative effort within the two teams wherein Codium brings in the innovative solutions for Beacon and its clients to ease out the complex dynamics of the ever-evolving regulatory guidelines.

Over time, the founder felt the need to build a payroll management company which could play as a cross sell to its set of clients BeaconPay provides payroll management & processing solutions, statutory compliance a one stop solution for all HR analytics. The company serves more than 40+ clients across India providing solutions to fit any needs and size of the business.

Beacon Capital is the latest venture that the group has entered. It's a JV between Mr. Nathani and Mr. Vasan Paulraj. Through this venture the idea is to provide advisory services in Private Equity domain in India and the UAE.

"Over the last 6 years, I have been looking to invest into businesses that align to our theme of annuity-based ventures and have been able to convince like-minded domain experts to run these businesses like startups. The domain experts that form a part of the Beacon Leadership Team are Kaustubh Kulkarni, Sowdamini Bhat, Jaydeep Bhattacharya, Mahesh Ghadi, Veena Nautiyal, Neelu Subramanium, Deepavali Vankalu, Sneha Patel & Seema Pawar. We continue to evaluate multiple opportunities including Compliance, PMS, Wealth Advisory, DP and RTA business to grow our annuity further" says an ambitious, Pratapsingh Nathani.

Sakif Shamim
Pioneering efforts to eradicate Cancer

Despite the heavy investments in research by the world's leading countries, cancer cure remains an enigma. A condition that no boundary globally, is a curse to citizens of countries that are not that affluent. What really helps is determination to overcome the condition, be it the patient or the medical team that is handling the situation. Sakif Shamim is emerging as that factor in Bangladesh's fight against cancer, bringing succor and infusing succor to lakhs of patients across the length and breadth of the country.

Sakif Shamim, Managing Director of Labaid Cancer Hospital

The Managing Director of Labaid Cancer Hospital and the Executive Director of Labaid Group of Bangladesh, Sakif Shamim has done his MSC in Major Programme Management from the University of Oxford (UK) and followed it up with an MBA from University of Chicago (USA). A well set professional career in Middle East, he gave it all up to return back to Bangladesh to lay the foundations of a strong healthcare system to exclusively address the rising incidences of cancer in his country.

Shamim, a young multitalented entrepreneur having more than 15 years of work experience with a Masters in Clinical Service Operation from Harvard Medical School under his belt, he has chanelling his business management and sustainable business development experience in Bangladesh, to lead a revolution in the healthcare sector. He has been playing an inspiring role in developing life altering medical solutions which impact millions in Bangladesh.

His creation, The Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre is the first Comprehensive Cancer Care Hospital across Bangladesh. Deploying cutting-edge technology, the Cancer Center provides radiotherapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy and organ specific treatment to all the patients. It has an expert Oncology Team comprising of domain experts, supported by a well-organized Multidisciplinary Treatment Board (Tumor Board) as well as expert medical professionals and skilled nurses.

Its experienced & highly dedicated Oncology team comprises of Medical Oncologist, Radiation Oncologist, Surgical Oncologist, Gynecological Oncologist, Pediatric Oncologist, Haemato-Oncologist, Medical Physicist, Radiologist &amp; fully equipped pathology Lab, Molecular Laboratory, ICU, HDU, 8 Modular advance OT, BMT unit, Transplantation, Day Care Centre, Dialysis Centre, Palliative care and Psychotherapy Centre, 24/7 Emergency Pharmacy service and all Superspeciality in-patient departments.

Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre is committed to provide trusted healthcare services driven by excellence through the innovation, quality, team work & advanced technologies to ensure optimum patient care and satisfaction, setting a milestone in the field of the cancer treatment in the Sub-continent.

Shamim's vision for Bangladesh is not compete yet. He dreams of a network of 30 Cancer Centers through-out the Bangladesh, with 20 Tertiary & Superspeciality hospitals spanning the world. His future plans include Robotic surgery & solid-organ transplant. His effort re already yielding results as Bangladesh joins in the Research & Development and Clinical trials for new drug development.

Shamim has also created the largest digital healthcare platform called LifePlus BD, to make Healthcare affordable. Harnessing the power of digital technology, he in the process of banking medical data for the past 15 years. This will boost the success ratio of patients, over time.

Shamim's efforts hasn't gone unnoticed. He has been a recipient of slew of awards.

They say, every journey starts with a single step. Shamim started off with a clear vision and a goal. Building a team of like minded people he marches ahead relentlessly, to make the world a healthier place.

ISB&M – Creating World Class Corporate Leaders by benchmarking with the best

You have B-Schools and then you have ISB&M. While the curriculum is certainly important, this institution dins it into its students that they are being trained to take up positions of responsibility at leading organizations of the world. Creating an aspiration within them and helping them raise their standards to stand shoulder to shoulder with the best of professionals, the Institute is doing a yeoman service to the industry and the next generation.

Pramod Kumar
ISB&M Group

Dr. Pramod Kumar is a great educationist and visionary. He has done Ph. D in the area of Organizational Behavior from IIT Mumbai. Held various research and faculty positions in IIT Mumbai, IIM Ahmedabad, and XLRI Jamshedpur. Leadership positions as Research and Former Placement Chairperson at XLRI, Ex- Director Symbiosis Institute of Business Management (SIBM), Pune.

Author of over 100 research papers, cases, management games. Research is quoted extensively by other researchers and authors internationally including text books such as Organizational Behaviour by SP Robbins

Consultant and trainer in Behavioural Science & HRD to over 80 Indian & Multinational companies in India and abroad. Some of these include HLL, Glaxo Smithkline Beecham (GSK), Zee Network, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, NTPC, Honda Power Products, LG India, TIL, BHEL. Also consultant to UNICEF and on World Bank Projects.

Had been Member of Served on Government of India Committees on Management Education.

Aspire to build a large and highly respected educational organization in India and globally.

Dr. Kumar has laid down the rules that his institution and hence his wards, will follow throughout their careers. They will look for and follow the best practices and standards. They will maintain national and global character and also promote an egalitarian & friendly culture. They will strive to create a rewarding sense of belongingness for mutual growth. Resting solidly on these pillars, the institution has risen up into a grand edifice of excellence.

ISB&M offers 2 years full time Career – Oriented dual specialization PGDM programme, approved by AICTE in Marketing, Finance, HR, SCOM (only for Engineers), Media & Communication & Business Analytics. Its learning programme is driven by a high quality faculty who have been associated with top B-Schools of India through their education and past work experience. It continuously innovates on teaching & learning process with Guided Self- Study (GSS), new format of performance feedback etc. Students are encouraged to develop self-learning orientation. GSS, while common among top American & European institutions, is new unique feature of ISB&M learning programme.

ISB&M benchmarks its education process and curriculum with the best in the world. They are objective focused and recognize the aspirations & needs of our students for rewarding and big future. They train their students to work with the best employers across the globe such as Google, Apple, Amazon, E&Y, Goldman Sachs, KPMG, Deloitte, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley, Microsoft, Sony, Johnson & Johnson, IBM, TATA Group, Reliance in USA, Europe, Australia, Canada, Middle East and in India. Their students are nurtured to be at a competitive benchmark of A team, not B team. The students are prepared to excel professionally and socialize in a global environment.

Established in the year 2000. The Institute has managed to be amongst the top 2% B-Schools in India in terms of Education & Career Building within a span of 23 years, with Campuses in Pune, Kolkata & Bangalore. ISB&M has consistently achieved outstanding campus placements since its inception and the recent final placement has been remarkably admirable with an average package of 14.63 lacs CTC and the expected highest being 20.56 Lacs. Big corporates like Optum, TresVista, Hewlett-Packard, Ergode Inc Sutherland Global, Trinamix, FIS, Schneider Electric, Avata, British Telecom (BT), The Adecco Group, Deloitte Taxation, Deloitte Consulting, Korn Ferry, APTIV, PwC, GEP Worldwide, Wipro Signify (Philips Lighting), AstraZeneca, Trident Group, TCS and Dun & Bradstreet etc have become regulars at the campus.

Over 10500 Alumni are working with top Indian & MNCs in senior positions like Director- HR, Sr. Vice President, Vice President, and Director Marketing, Supply Chain etc. ISB&M Alumni work with 80% of the world's top 20 most preferred MBA employers e.g Google, Apple, Amazon, E&Y, Goldman Sachs, KPMG, Deloitte, JP Morgan, Boston Consulting Group, Morgan Stanley, Microsoft, Sony, Johnson & Johnson, IBM etc

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  Source : The Economic Times
- ISB&M Group, has been awarded with Most Influential Leaders
  Sources: Economic Times 30, July, 2022.
- ISB&M Group, has been awarded with Visionary Leaders
  Sources: Times of India Group 20, June 2022
- ISB&M Group, has been awarded with ICONS of Leadership Award
  Source: Business Today 12, January 2022

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WILL THE SMILES LAST? CM Eknath Shinde with deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis

ANI

BRACING FOR TOUGH TIMES

The Shinde-Fadnavis government lives another day, but the CM is yet to come out of the BJP's shadow, check internal dissidence, and neutralise sympathy for the Sena's Thackeray faction

By Dhaval Kulkarni

Even when everything seems to be going right for Eknath Shinde, the sense of unease refuses to leave him. He may have been made chief minister, but he has to constantly battle attempts by the BJP to undermine him, and shake off the perception of being in power but not in authority. Again, the Election Commission of India (ECI) may have granted his faction the status of the official Shiv Sena and also allowed them to retain the party's bow and arrow symbol, but it's the Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray faction that is garnering all the sympathy. And on May 11, a five-judge constitution bench, headed by the Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, offered his government a reprieve by refusing to restore status quo ante and reinstate Thackeray as chief minister since he had voluntarily resigned a day before he was asked to prove his majority on the floor of the House. But it is by no means the end of Shinde's troubles.

For, even as the judgment has helped him continue in power, the Thackeray camp has claimed moral victory because the apex court pointed to lapses in the action taken by then governor H.S. Koshyari in ordering Thackeray to take a floor test after Shinde and his legislators rebelled against the Thackeray-led Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition in June 2022. Likewise, the Supreme Court also questioned the assembly speaker's role in the entire episode. This beratement by the apex court, claim Thackeray's supporters, strengthens their contention that the BJP—Shinde's partner in the state—misused government machinery and the central investigation agencies to dislodge the MVA coalition, and will boost sympathy for them among voters due to the perception that they have been wronged. Thackeray, on his part, has used the apex court's adverse observations to dare Shinde and Fadnavis to resign on moral grounds.

"The judgment has made it clear that the system was misused to topple our government... this will boost public sympathy for us as it has deepened the perception that we have been wronged," says a senior leader of the Thackeray Sena. The victory of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) candidate Rutuja Latke in the Andheri East assembly bypolls in November 2022 and, more crucially, that of Ravindra Dhangekar of the Congress from the BJP bastion of Kasba Peth in Pune (March 2023) is seen as a vindication of the claim that voters sympathise with Thackeray and the MVA. The recent polls of the Agriculture Produce Market Committees have seen Shinde's ministers take a beating.

Shinde's other source of trouble lies within, as his legislators are likely to bear on him to immediately expand his cabinet now that the Supreme Court has offered the ruling coalition a reprieve. Shinde and Fadnavis were sworn in as chief minister and deputy chief minister, respectively, on June 30, 2022, and intense lobbying within the Shinde camp for ministerial berths led to the cabinet being expanded only 40 days later to include nine ministers from each side. The next round of expansion, says Sanjay Gaikwad, Shinde loyalist and Shiv Sena MLA from Buldhana, is expected to take place by May-end. This is where Shinde will have to "walk the tightrope," as a Lok Sabha MP from his camp admits, as several legislators from his faction are vying for ministerial berths.

The Maharashtra council of ministers can have a strength of 43, including the chief minister, and while Shinde is insisting on getting an equal share of ministerial berths and positions on state-run corporations, senior BJP leaders say that their party, which has a bench strength of 106 versus 40 for Shinde, is in no mood to oblige. Shinde may get between four and six ministerial positions, with the rest going the BJP's way. This is bound to lead to intense disgruntlement among those who do not make it and Shinde may have a difficult time keeping dissidence in check, since many MLAs are said to have joined him expecting a cabinet berth. But, as the Lok Sabha MP points out, the disgruntlement will not reach disruptive levels due to the fear of central investigating agencies getting into the act.

Following the Supreme Court verdict in favour of the Shinde Sena, the MP says they are expecting some of the fence-sitters from the Thackeray-led faction to join them. "There was an air of uncertainty over the constitutional legality and future of this government, but they have been laid to rest now. The ECI has already awarded the Shiv Sena name and symbol to us. Put together, this may lead to more defections into our party," he claims. The BJP's ability to browbeat the Shinde Sena by holding out the prospect of engineering defections from the NCP will also diminish. Gaikwad adds that the increasing rumblings in the MVA and questions about its future would lead to some leaders and MLAs joining them. "Thackeray's immature politics has led to this situation," he says.

Shinde's most daunting challenge, however, is establishing his credentials as a leader and administrator, says a senior BJP leader, who is also a legislator. "In the administration, he is overshadowed by Fadnavis. His party is more of a loose conglomeration of legislators. He has no second rung to speak of," he notes.

SHINDE'S BUMPY ROAD

The Shinde-Fadnavis government may have received a breather from the Supreme Court, but it still has several challenges to surmount

- Shinde will have to contend with demands from his legislators for cabinet berths or posts on state-run corporations
- The Maharashtra council of ministers can have a strength of 43 ministers, including the chief minister, deputy chief minister, cabinet ministers and ministers of state. At present, the cabinet has 20 ministers, including Shinde and Fadnavis. The Shinde camp is insisting on an equal division of the remaining cabinet berths. However, the BJP, whose numbers in the assembly are almost thrice that of the Shinde group (not counting independents and smaller parties), is not in a mood to concede. Shinde may get between four to six ministerial berths
- The government will also have to overcome the perception that there is popular sympathy for Uddhav Thackeray and the opposition MVA
- Shinde's most daunting challenge is to establish his credentials as a leader and administrator and counter the deepening narrative that his authority is being undermined by the BJP

MORAL VICTORY?
Uddhav Thackeray

MANDAR DEODHAR

THE THACKERAY CAMP CLAIMS THAT THE SC RULING **WILL BOOST SYMPATHY FOR THEM AMONG VOTERS** DUE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT THEY HAVE BEEN WRONGED

A rainbow coalition of three radically diverse parties such as the Shiv Sena, NCP and the Congress, the MVA was seen as a convenient arrangement to keep the BJP out of power. This made the MVA government's demise more of a tactical and expedient necessity for the saffron party. And while the Thackeray faction may have sympathy on its side for the moment, the challenge, says a legislator from the camp, lies in maintaining this sentiment as "much water would have flown down the bridge by the time the elections take place." The elections to local bodies, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, are likely to take place after October and seen as the warm-up for the Lok Sabha polls due early next year.

A senior Congress leader and former minister also points to how the Shiv Sena and MVA leaderships have taken a series of missteps. "Thackeray should have faced a trust vote and spoken in the House before putting in his papers like Atal Bihari Vajpayee did in 1996. This would have also made for good optics. Thackeray backed off perhaps because he felt he would have been insulted by the rebels... it also showed that he had no idea about how parliamentary democracy functions," he explains. More crucially, in February 2021, Nana Patole, who was appointed the president of the Maharashtra Congress, stepped down as the assembly speaker, reportedly without consulting his MVA colleagues. Koshyari, the then-governor, sat on the MVA government's request to call for elections to the post. Rahul Narwekar of the BJP was elected as the speaker only after the new regime took charge.

Now, the SC has asked Narwekar to decide on the disqualification petitions filed by the rival camps against their legislators "within a reasonable period." Of the 56 Shiv Sena MLAs, disqualification petitions have been filed against 54, except Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) leader Aaditya Thackeray and Latke. In the records of the legislature, the Shiv Sena legislature party is considered as one unit. The court said the speaker would "prima facie determine who the political party is for the purpose of adjudicating disqualification petitions". In a shot in the arm for the Thackeray faction, the SC ruled that the political party, and not the legislature party, appoints the whip and the leader of the party in the House. Narwekar's decision to recognise Shinde loyalist and Mahad MLA Bharat Gogawale as the Shiv Sena's chief whip was also termed "illegal" as it was based solely on the resolution of a faction of the legislature party. It said the speaker shall recognise the whip and the group leader authorised by the Shiv Sena political party and this should be done after referring to the party constitution, after conducting an enquiry and in keeping with the principles in the SC judgment.

Senior editor and political analyst Sandeep Pradhan says Maharashtra could now witness a battle between two competing narratives. One by the Thackeray side, which claims that the BJP had reneged on its word to share the CM's position with the Shiv Sena, forcing him to join hands with the Congress and the NCP, and then, the BJP misused the machinery, including the central probe agencies, to topple his regime. The counter-narrative by Shinde and the BJP is that Thackeray had betrayed the ideology of Hindutva to ally with "secular" parties like the Congress and the NCP for power. "The side that can present its side more convincingly to the masses will gain," says Pradhan, adding that the SC's decision could also widen the fissures between the BJP and Shinde. "The verdict has come as a morale booster for Shinde and his men. Hence, Shinde may not tolerate any attempts by the BJP state leadership to corner him or to strike a deal with the NCP. On the other hand, it must also be noted that the speaker, whose role in the deadlock is crucial, is a BJP man," he avers. Meanwhile, the election results in Karnataka have thrown another curve ball. MVA constituents believe the BJP's defeat in Karnataka has boosted their chances in Maharashtra were they to contest polls. Districts like Kolhapur, Solapur, Sangli and Latur share their borders with Karnataka. The Lingayats also account for significant numbers in parts of western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada. The wicket seems to have turned weak for Shinde and the BJP. ■

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STALIN'S HINDU PUSH

THE DMK GOVERNMENT IS SPRUCING UP THE STATE'S SHRINES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT—AND SUBTLY CHANGING ITS OWN IMAGE IN THE PROCESS

BY AMARNATH K. MENON

SCAFFOLDED Maintenance work at the Arulmigu Varageeswaran temple in Kancheepuram, TN

The M.K. Stalin-led Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government is striving to give the state's temples a makeover and, in the bargain, give itself one too. A massive renovation plan is afoot for Hindu shrines, including the retrieval of encroached land. The state's Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department, which oversees temple administration in Tamil Nadu, has been issuing eviction notices thick and fast. Budgetary allocations for conservation and creating pilgrim amenities have gone up manifold in the past two years.

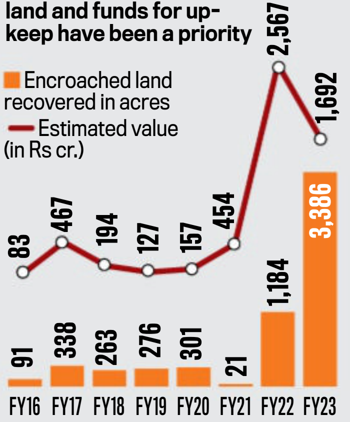
"Temples," Stalin had said at an HR&CE event in January, "are the symbols of our art and culture, their architecture an example of our artistic excellence. It is our duty to preserve them." In doing so, the Tamil Nadu chief minister is also hoping to present his party in a new avatar. Rationalism and social reform have always been at the core of the Dravidian movement, which has had such stalwarts as the atheist E.V. Ramasamy at its helm. The DMK, too, is a child of that movement. Addressing the concern that its ideology perhaps makes the party averse to religion, Stalin had added, "Those who lack reason criticise Dravidian tenets and say we are anti-religion. We are opposed to fanatics, not religion."

Spearheading Stalin's 'Hindu push' is the state's pro-active HR&CE minister P.K. Sekar Babu, a staunch believer himself. Under his stewardship, the department has not only undertaken the mammoth task of assessing the 45,809 temples and other Hindu institutions under its supervision, but also, as Sekar disclosed in the state assembly this March, ensured that in the past two years "encroachments in immovable properties belonging to 502 religious institutions have been removed and 4,501.8 acres of agricultural land, 809 vacant plots, 156 building grounds have been recovered. Some 132 grounds around temple tanks were also restored". The previous AIADMK regime, he said, had retrieved only 3,177 acres in the 10 years it was in power. The current initiatives, Sekar believes, have ushered in an "era of spiritual revolution". The new-found 'energy' is also finding acknowledgement. "The government and the minister have infused energy into a sleepy HR&CE department," says Karumuttu T. Kannan, a trustee of the 800-year-old Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai.

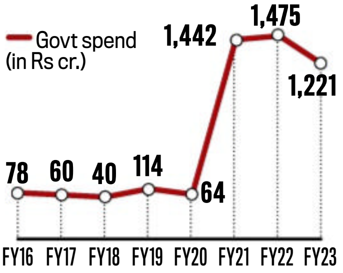
But what exactly are the contours of the DMK government's temple plans? To begin with, the department found that over 35,000 of the 45,809 temples under its charge, reportedly do not generate enough income to sustain themselves. As a result, 150 licensed surveyors have now been deployed now to survey and assess the temple assets. "They have covered 108,000 acres of the total 475,000 acres," says B. Chandra Mohan, principal secretary, tourism, culture and religious endowments.

THE FAITH AGGREGATOR

Since the DMK came to power in 2021, recovering encroached temple land and funds for upkeep have been a priority



CONSERVATION/ PILGRIMS' RELIEF WORKS TAKEN UP



A SACRED GEOGRAPHY

Modern survey technologies such as Differential Global Positioning Systems (DGPS) and Geographical Information System (GIS) are being used to survey land even as records are being digitised. The DGPS helps capture precise land boundaries and dimensions. The ground measurements are linked with geographical data attributes in a GIS format to create a digital database. All temple assets and land records will now be registered in the name of the deities to prevent individuals and other entities from usurping them. This should curtail the numerous cases of temple mismanagement pending in various courts.

Encroachments, though, remain a primary challenge. In September 2021, the state amended the Tamil Nadu HR&CE Act, 1959, to make encroachment of properties belonging to religious institutions a non-bailable offence. Anyone with an interest in the affairs of the religious institution could lodge complaints against encroachers. Sekar says properties worth Rs 4,226 crore have already been reclaimed in the past two years (see *The Faith Aggregator*).

The stock-taking of temples and recovery of encroached land apart, the larger concern is to ensure that all endangered temples—around 600 of them over 1,000 years old—receive regular maintenance. Archaeologists, conservation specialists and HR&CE engineers have already done an analysis of these temples. The government has set aside about Rs 100 crore a year for this restoration and conservation exercise. A corpus of Rs 2 lakh each has been set aside for 15,000 temples, the interest income from which can be used to meet daily expenses. "The Oru Kalai Poojai scheme offering a government grant to financially weak temples is a great move," says *sorpozhivu* (oral storytelling) exponent Desa Mangaiyarkarasi. The priests are also eligible for a monthly honorarium of Rs 500.

Besides the renovation of shrines that are more than a thousand years old, 15 temples are also in for an “iconic transformation”. These are places that have a special significance in the state’s religious pantheon. “The ambience of the temple and its grounds is being transformed. Rituals and processes for worship will be streamlined,” says Mohan. Some 560 temples will see their precincts developed based on master plans. The HR&CE is also fast-tracking maintenance in temples where the once-in-12-years *kumbhabhishekam* ritual is coming up. Already, 650 temples have been consecrated. Giving a facelift to the *rajagopurams* (temple towers) and chariots is another priority. Of the 1,097 wooden chariots belonging to 854 temples, 34, which are in bad condition, are being repaired in the first phase. New chariots are also being built for 16 temples. A research centre is being set up at the office of the commissioner, HR&CE, to conserve the palm leaf manuscripts in the repositories of many temples and digitise the content.

TACTICAL PLOY

There is no denying that the regime’s pro-Hindu efforts come at a time when the Madras High Court is hearing a slew of past petitions on temple mismanagement and an aggressive BJP is trying to get a foot in the door in the state. Diehard detractors maintain the department is bad for the temples and want them “freed” of government control. They say that India, being a secular country, should not have state ‘control’ of religious institutions. Places of worship of other religions, like mosques and churches, are not under government control, so why temples? “State control of temples is wrong,” says T.R. Ramesh, president of the Indic Collective and Temple Worshippers Society. “Articles 25, 26 and 29 of the Constitution are violated by appointing executive officers in the temples of Tamil Nadu. It is causing tremendous damage to the interests of deities and devotees. Moreover, temples of different *sampradayas* (traditions) cannot be brought under a single board.” Others allege financial mismanagement by the HR&CE department. State BJP president K. Annamalai alleges it “exploits the temple *hundi* (till)” despite taking 16 per cent of the revenue—12 per cent towards administrative expenses and 4 per cent for audit. “There is a huge gap between the amount spent on auditing and what is charged to the temples,” he says.

Ex-finance and current IT and digital services minister P. Thiaga Rajan (PTR), though, dismisses the critics. “Most of these warriors for ‘privatising temples’ have done little for their welfare...in fact, many of the ‘privatise’ claimants historically made a living out of the temple assets and donations,” he says.

The legislation to manage temples is close to a hundred years old. PTR’s grand-uncle M.T. Subramania Mudaliar had, in fact, played a role in the legislation of the Hindu Religious Endowments Act, 1927. The Justice Party pioneered the act that led to the constitution of the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Board and the appointment of executive officers to temples. There was opposition from entrenched groups, but Panagatti Ramarayaningar, the then premier of the Madras Presidency, convinced British viceroy Lord Irwin and got his approval.

“TEMPLES ARE SYMBOLS OF OUR ART AND CULTURE. IT IS OUR DUTY TO PROTECT THEM. THOSE WHO SAY WE ARE ANTI-HINDU DO NOT UNDERSTAND DRAVIDIAN TENETS... WE ARE ONLY OPPOSED TO FANATICS, NOT RELIGION”

M.K. STALIN
Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu

Post-Independence, the Madras Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Act, 1951, led to the creation of a department of HR&CE. Many interested groups challenged it as the law abolished the system of hereditary employees and empowered the state to regulate the affairs of Hindu temples and mutts. After prolonged litigation, the TN HR&CE Act, 1959, finally came into force.

Over the decades, however, oversight weakened. Today, vacancies to trustee posts for 560 temples with an annual income of over Rs 10 lakh are being filled. The Madras HC has asked the state to appoint trustees in all 38 districts by May-end. These trustees manage the temples, which the HR&CE oversees while contributing to the administrative costs. The temples contribute to the administration fund depending on their capacity and income.

A TOURIST ATTRACTION

The state has a stake in its temples also because 600,000-800,000 people visit them daily, the numbers doubling on weekends and holidays and rising manifold on festival days. Tamil Nadu has retained the top spot in religious tourism for over a decade, recording 134 million tourist footfalls. To sustain this pilgrim flow, the state is pulling out all the stops. The state tourism development corporation, which has packages for pilgrims, now also offers bookings for temple-owned guesthouses through its Alayam service. Health centres are being developed near temples. At the hilltop temples in Palani, Anuvavi in Coimbatore and Thirukazhukundram in Chengalpattu, ropeway cars are being installed. Chennai and Mahabalipuram have the first-of-their-kind climate-resilient green temples. These “self-sufficient temples” boast of basic utilities such as drinking water, as well as solid waste treatment plants, solar lighting and microplastics management facilities. “All these measures are people-centric,” says Kundrakudi Ponnambala Adigalar, head of the Thiruvannamalai Mutt. “Their impact on the faith will be felt over time.” Mohan, too, believes credibility has gone up, “which is why devotees too are donating generously.” It also helps that norms for ‘donor-led works’ have been eased. In restoring shrines of the Hindu faith, Stalin, it seems, is inviting people to have faith in his government. ■

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NOW LETHAL SEA DRONES

UNMANNED SURFACE AND UNDERWATER VESSELS ARE SET TO TRANSFORM NAVAL OPERATIONS AND WARFARE. AS THE INDIAN NAVY PREPARES TO ACQUIRE A FLEET, DOMESTIC MANUFACTURERS ARE PITCHING IN

By Pradip R. Sagar

BRAINB
SMART SHIP OPER

INDIGENOUS MOVE Tardid Technology's USV, Brainbox Smart Ship Operations, which is being developed for the Indian Navy

The Ukraine conflict has seen the emergence of Unmanned Aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones as a potent military weapon. Along with traditional drones, another lethal, unmanned weapon was unleashed in late October 2022, when, in a bold move, the Ukrainian navy attacked Russia's Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol, on the Crimean peninsula, with seven unmanned surface vessels (USVs)—each 5.5 metre long, with a gross weight of 1,000 kg, and packed with explosives and missiles. Two more attacks were attempted on Russian naval assets in March and April. Though the Russian Navy repelled all three attacks, they announced the advent of USVs as a force in naval warfare. Not just USVs, the navies of the US, UK, China and France are rapidly adding more variety in their unmanned armoury—Naval Unmanned Aerial Systems (NUAS) and Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs). NUAS are advanced drones, but are ship-borne and integrated with the host ship's system, with launch and recovery capabilities like in a carrier with its aircraft. UUVs, also known as underwater drones, operate under the water surface and are akin to unmanned submarines. USVs, UUVs and NUAS can be either remote-controlled or autonomous. The latter involves extensive use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), crucial for functions like autonomous navigation and obstacle recognition and avoidance, and the use of sophisticated cameras and sensors. Though all three can be designed to carry a munitions payload and used to strike enemy warships, till now they have mostly been used for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). Non-military uses of these unmanned craft include oceanographic and hydrographic surveys. While unmanned aerial vehicles or drones carry sensors, target designators, transmitters, GPS, autopilot systems and AI technology, USVs and UUVs have computer software/ AI tied to payload requirements, power and propulsion, hull design and communications. These help USVs and UUVs to not only perform their designated function, but also to avoid surface and underwater obstacles. The USV/ UUV market is estimated to be $0.77 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach $1.2 billion by 2027, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.1 per cent from 2022 to 2027.

INDIAN NAVAL PLANNERS RECOGNISE THE ADVANTAGES OF UNMANNED CRAFT: **NO RISK TO PERSONNEL, GREATER RANGE,** SPEED AND ACCURACY OF DATA

Aware of the quickening turn of events, the Indian Navy is aggressively working on its 'unmanned roadmap'. On its wish list are remotely operated and autonomous USVs, UUVs and NUAS. Indian naval planners recognise the advantages of these unmanned craft: reduced manpower requirement and zero risk to personnel, lower operating costs, greater range, improved speed and accuracy of data processing and thus a faster decision cycle. As of now, the objective is to utilise these platforms for ISR purposes, but the option of military use is open too. As with other defence hardware, support and encouragement is being given to domestic firms. To meet its immediate needs, though, the navy is looking at foreign makers. The rising maritime threat from China lends urgency to the matter.

A SILENT ARMADA

Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs) and Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) can transform naval operations. India is developing some of its own, while other countries are at a more advanced stage

↘ BRAINBOX SMART SHIP OPERATIONS

Developed by Tardid Technology, the USV is 8 m long, with endurance of 12 hrs and speed of 12 nmph. To be used for surveillance missions, but can be weaponised too. Also has stealth capability, vast array of sensors, high bandwidth satellite data link networks

अदम्य
LARSEN & TOUBRO

↘ ARMED AUTONOMOUS UNCREWED BOAT

Developed by Sagar Defence Engineering Ltd, this lethal USV has swarming capability, AI-based collision avoidance, and smart vision capability suites

↘ REMOTELY OPERATED UNDERWATER VEHICLE, AUTONOMOUS UNDERWATER VEHICLE

These UUVs are being developed by L&T Defence, MDL and DRDO. They have swarm technology, endurance of 10-20 hours. Per global standards, lightweight AUVs are compatible with torpedo tubes on ships/ submarines, endurance of two days; heavy, high-endurance AUVs can remain submerged for as many as 15 days

The Indian navy came up with a global tender last year to acquire 40 NUAS for warships over 100 metres in length. The unmanned aerial systems would be used for surveillance, including signals intelligence (SIGINT) and maritime domain awareness around a naval task force. The tender also mentioned secondary responsibilities like helping with search and rescue, anti-piracy and anti-terrorist operations. The process of acquiring 10 ship-borne NUAS worth around Rs 1,300 crore is on the fast track mode. At present, the Indian navy operates the Israeli-made Heron and Searcher Mk-II drones for reconnaissance. However, ship-borne NUAS are a cut above—they are equipped with a wider range of payloads, including high-resolution synthetic aperture radars, IR systems, electronic intelligence (ELINT), SIGINT and situational awareness systems, as well as anti-surface and anti-ship munitions. The US Navy's MQ-4C Triton and MQ-8B Fire Scout and China's Guizhou Xianglong (Soar Dragon) are the most advanced aerial systems. The navy is also likely to shop for foreign-made UUVs.

In 2021, former navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh had mentioned 'underwater domain awareness' as a critical area, mentioning the 'Chinese' autonomous underwater gliders found lurking in Indonesian waters in 2020. Soon after this, in October 2021, Vice Admiral Ashok Kumar, then the vice chief of the navy and now India's first national maritime security coordinator (NMSC), unveiled a detailed roadmap of the navy's requirements for unmanned platforms and shared it with the domestic industry.

Commodore Anil Jai Singh, a former submariner who is now the vice president of the Indian Maritime Foundation, says that unmanned platforms will play a significant role as force multipliers. “USVs and UUVs that are being developed can complement the existing submarine capability. Their modular configuration gives them the flexibility to carry different payloads, thus making them ideal for a variety of roles and missions,” he says, adding that they will be an integral part of a 'networked' battlespace in littoral as well as blue waters and are an asset for enhancing both maritime, including underwater, domain awareness.

According to a top official at the naval headquarters in New Delhi, “The current global environment is witnessing an explosive growth of autonomous systems, which are poised to revolutionise warfare. Unmanned and autonomous systems will create fundamental shifts in the way warfare is conducted.”

THE CHINESE THREAT

India's growing emphasis on unmanned capability for its navy has much to do with the clear and present danger from the Chinese navy's expansionist moves. In a bid to counter their growing presence in the Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy has been taking steps to improve its surveillance. USVs, UUVs and ship-borne aerial systems can be a game-changer in this.

Recently, navy chief Admiral R. Harikumar said that at any point in time, there are three-six Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), from the Gulf of Oman to its eastern fringes. Chinese research vessels and fishing vessels are also ubiquitous. “So, we refine our plans of actions and this feeds into our capability development,” he said. China gets unfettered access to the IOR through Pakistan's Gwadar port, which it is developing under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor project, and its possession of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port affords it a presence in India's perceived backyard. It also has a military base in the Indian Ocean in Djibouti. China's footprint in naval unmanned technology is growing. In January 2023, it launched Zhu Hai Yun—the world's first unmanned drone carrier, which can both be controlled

UKRAINE'S USV: The maritime drones used to attack the Russian fleet in Sevastopol in October 2022 were each 5.5 m long, with a range of 40 km, 60-hr endurance and warhead load of up to 200 kilos

US NAVY'S T-38 DEVIL RAY USV Developed by MARTAC, the T-38 Devil Ray has a speed of 25 knots and can carry a payload of 2,050 kg

CHINA'S SEA WING UNDERWATER GLIDERS These are a type of UUVs that are unpowered and employ the variable-buoyancy propulsion system. They also have large wings that enable them to glide forward over vast distances

ACCORDING TO TOP NAVAL OFFICIALS, AUTONOMOUS AND UNMANNED SYSTEMS WILL FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE THE WAY NAVAL WARFARE IS CONDUCTED

remotely and navigate autonomously. The 88.5m-long craft can carry drones, UUVs and USVs on board.

DOMESTIC PUSH

While the Integrated Unmanned Roadmap of the Indian Navy of 2021 was a comprehensive charter in consonance with the Indian Navy's 'Concept of Operations', the navy's Vision Document for Unmanned Systems 2022-30 is a capability development document to guide stakeholders who possess the resources to accelerate the development of unmanned systems.

Likewise, multiple Indian start-ups and firms in the MSME sector, along with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), are working on developing indigenous technology for unmanned platforms. Currently, the navy is steering five projects involving private industry, all aiming to bolster *atmanirbharta* (self-sufficiency) in the unmanned domain—unmanned high endurance autonomous underwater vessels (HEAUVs), autonomous surface vessels, semi-submersible autonomous vessels and buoyancy underwater gliders (a type of UUV). Two such firms in an advanced stage of completing their projects are Tardid Technology and Sagar Defence Engineering Ltd. The navy aims to induct all these platforms within the next few years.

Aastha Verma, COO of Bengaluru-based Tardid Technology, believes that unmanned surface vessels are emerging as the future of maritime security in the Indian Ocean. "These unmanned vessels, equipped with state-of-the-art technology, can operate in remote and harsh environments, providing real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities," she says. The USV Tardid is developing, Brainbox Smart Ship Operations, has a length of about eight metres, an endurance (the maximum time it can operate without being refuelled) of over 12 hours and can travel at a speed of 12 nautical miles per hour. Brainbox units being developed for the navy are for reconnaissance, though they can be weaponised, says Verma.

Pune-based Sagar Defence Engineering Ltd (SDEL) is working with the navy to develop India's first armed autonomous uncrewed boat with swarming capabilities. Swarming technology involves several 'networked' or interconnected vessels that perform a task in clusters—be it minesweeping, intelligence-gathering, surveillance or striking enemy targets. The Indian Navy is using the USV project to better understand and evaluate the capabilities of USV swarms. If successful, high numbers can be ordered.

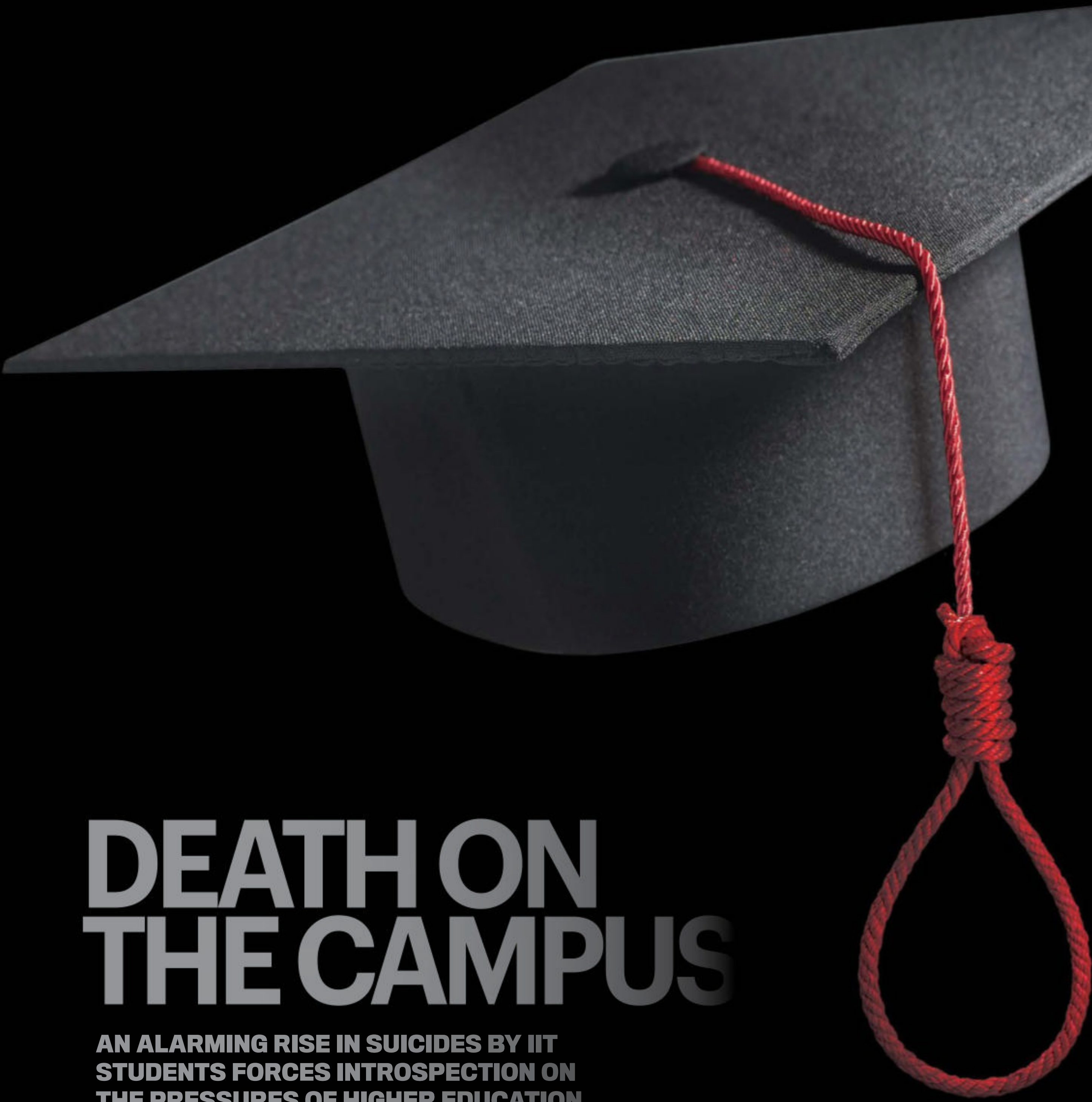
Captain Nikunj Parashar of SDEL says that full autonomous capability involves AI-based Collision Avoidance (CA) and smart mission capability suites. The USV, he says, includes an onboard computer-aided detection, classification and tracking system for target identification and a secure digital autonomous communication harness along with AI vision.

SDEL is also developing another AI-enabled autonomous USV, with the key innovation being a multi-level autonomous modular control architecture, which will enable the implementation of navigation algorithms at the desired control level for various missions and weather/ sea conditions. This USV, says Parashar, is especially suitable for missions like special surveillance and reconnaissance operations inside hostile territory, including diving operations and special raids, and counter-terrorism operations.

Both Tardid and SDEL say that the first prototypes of the USVs they are developing are due to be delivered to the navy by August 2023.

Besides USVs, the Indian Navy is also seeking unmanned underwater vehicles—both Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicles (ROUVs) and Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs). Indigenous UUVs are at an early stage of development, with Larsen & Toubro Defence, Mazagon Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) and DRDO already on the job.

Former eastern naval commander Vice Admiral A.K. Singh says that USVs, UUVs and combat drones are the future for the Indian Navy. "We are behind the US, UK and even Turkish navies in the unmanned vessels domain. The urgent need is for USVs and UUVs to counter mines. The ongoing decline in our submarine force levels is also a cause for concern." If left unaddressed, the navy will be at sea on the high seas. ■



DEATH ON THE CAMPUS

AN ALARMING RISE IN SUICIDES BY IIT STUDENTS FORCES INTROSPECTION ON THE PRESSURES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By **KAUSHIK DEKA**

Illustration by **NILANJAN DAS**

On April 21, Kedar Suresh Chougule, a second-year B.Tech. student of Chemical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, was found hanging in his hostel room. Ironically, his death came three days after Dharmendra Pradhan, the Union minister of education, directed the prestigious engineering institutes to provide robust mental health support for students. Pradhan was addressing the 55th meeting of the IIT Council, the highest decision-making body for the institutes, at Bhubaneswar. Chougule's was the sixth suicide on IIT campuses in the first four months of 2023. Three other students had taken their lives in IIT Madras, while another two died by suicide on the IIT Bombay and IIT Guwahati campuses during the same period.

"Academic stress, family and personal reasons and mental health issues are some of the reasons for such suicides," Subhas Sarkar, the Union minister of state for education, told Parliament on March 27. His statement came while disclosing a grim statistic: 33 students had died by suicide on IIT campuses since 2018. With two more added to this horrific tally in April, this number was one higher than the 34 students in the country's 23 IITs who died by suicide in the eight years between 2014 and 2021, another revelation that came on the floor of Parliament on December 20, 2021. And this is excluding the unsuccessful suicide attempts. On February 13, a first-year B.Tech. student attempted to kill himself at IIT Madras, the very day that Stephen Sunny, a second-year MS research scholar in Electrical Engineering, ended his life in his hostel room.

It was no surprise, therefore, that the mental health of students was the prime focus during the IIT Council meet. While emphasising the need to build a robust grievance redressal system, increasing psychological counselling services and reducing pressure, fear of failure and rejection among students, Pradhan also advocated zero tolerance for any kind of discrimination. Caste discrimination is an unacknowledged reality in the rarefied environs of the premier engineering institutes. It reared its ugly head yet again when IIT Bombay student Arman Khatri was arrested on charges of abetting the suicide of his classmate Darshan Solanki, a Dalit. In fact, of the 34 suicides between 2014 and 2021, 18 were by students from the Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Class communities. In 2021, the education ministry told the Rajya Sabha that 63 per cent of the undergraduate students who dropped out of the top seven IITs were from the backward category.

WHAT'S FUELLING THE TREND?

From high societal expectations for academic performance, peer pressure, inability to cope with the rigorous schedules, language barriers, increasing class sizes, caste discrimination, little personal connect with faculty to poor outreach by on-campus counsellors, a whole host of factors may contribute to the spike in suicidal tendencies. Students typically react to the high-pressure environment in two ways—they either get extremely competitive or go into a depressive phase. While those with strong social and economic support systems find it easier to deal with the ecosystem, others are more vulnerable. "These days," says an IIT professor, "most of those who come to the IITs have been through coaching centres

UNION EDUCATION MINISTER DHARMENDRA PRADHAN HAS STRESSED THE NEED FOR A ROBUST GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL SYSTEM AND INCREASING PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES AT IITs

where they are taught to solve the problems mechanically. In the formative years of their teens, they neither get any societal exposure nor build relationships of any kind, not even with their closest family members. In short, they have no internal mechanism for emotional support. In stress, they have no one to fall back on."

Nearly all the students who land up at the IITs are used to being toppers—in their schools and in the neighbourhood. When they come to the IITs, they find themselves in a crowd of toppers, where they are one among many and not necessarily the top of the pack.

Students at the IITs also come from different parts of the country, and their language, lifestyle, economic and education levels differ from each other. "Lots of students come with past baggage, which could range from family stress, financial liabilities to relationship issues. They don't share it with anyone because the environment within the IITs is not conducive to sharing," says Dr Harish Shetty, a Mumbai-based psychiatrist. Many come from vernacular medium schools and find it difficult to grasp tough concepts as the medium of instruction is mostly English. They start clocking poor grades, have high backlogs and fear that they will not live up to the high hopes everyone places on them. "Here, we are in a continuously competitive world," says Paridhi Baruah, a second-year B.Tech. student at IIT Guwahati. "It's not possible to perform all the time." Complexes start building up and, sadly, go unnoticed most of the time.

As in the case of Vaipu Pushpak Sreesai, a third-year B.Tech. student of IIT Madras, who died by suicide on March 14. He had stopped socialising with his friends since he started getting backlogs in his semesters. A native of Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh, Sreesai did not get any institutional support, claim his friends. However, even institutional support and treatment were not enough for Hari Prasath, a third-year B.Tech. student at IIT Delhi who ended his life in his hostel room in June 2021. He was doing well until the second year at the institute, but started struggling with his studies after that and went into depression. While he was undergoing treatment, his friends in a statement flagged the language barrier and cultural isolation among the reasons behind students' suicide. "His attendance was zero. He was failing in almost all subjects. He showed all signs of taking an extreme step, yet nobody paid much attention. Such is the mechanical world of the IITs," says one of his friends.

GRIM TALLY

IITs across the country are reporting frequent cases of suicides by students

JAISON G

WHAT AILS IITs
The entrance of IIT Madras in Chennai

IIT MADRAS

Apr. 21, 2023: Kedar Suresh Chougule, a second-year Chemical Engineering student from Maharashtra, is found hanging in his hostel room

Mar. 14: Vaipu Pushpak Sreesai, a third-year Electrical Engineering student from Andhra Pradesh, is discovered dead in his room

Feb. 13: Stephen Sunny, a second-year research scholar from Maharashtra, is found dead in his hostel room

IIT BOMBAY

Feb. 12, 2023: Darshan Solanki, a first-year student of the B.Tech. (Chemical) course from Ahmedabad, dies after jumping off the seventh floor of the hostel building. Later, his batchmate Arman Khatri is arrested on the charge of abetment to suicide

Jan. 17, 2022: Darshan Malviya, a post-graduate student from Madhya Pradesh, ends his life by jumping off the terrace of his hostel

IIT GUWAHATI

Jan. 9, 2023: Hrithik Bhavani, a B.Tech. final-year student from Nagpur, is found dead in his room under mysterious circumstances

"HAPPINESS IS A **COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY. OUR WELLNESS SURVEY** IS A STEP TO ENSURE THAT ON THE CAMPUS"

V. KAMAKOTI *Director, IIT Madras*

OF THE 35 STUDENTS WHO HAVE DIED BY SUICIDE ACROSS IITs SINCE 2018, 12 WERE FROM IIT MADRAS, THE HIGHEST AMONG ALL IITs

↘ **Oct. 10, 2022:** Gudla Mahesh Sai Raj, a fifth-semester B.Tech. student of Computer Science from Andhra Pradesh, hangs himself in his hostel room

↘ **Sept. 17, 2022:** Surya Narayan Premkishore, a student from Kerala pursuing B.Des., is found dead in his hostel room

IIT KHARAGPUR

↘ **Oct. 14, 2022:** The partially decomposed body of Faizan Ahmed, a third-year student of Mechanical Engineering from Assam's Tinsukia district, is discovered in his hostel room. Police have now slapped charges of criminal intimidation and causing the disappearance of evidence on five students and two employees

IIT KANPUR

↘ **Sept. 8, 2022:** Prashant Singh, a Ph.D. student of Mechanical Engineering from Varanasi, is found hanging inside his hostel room

IIT HYDERABAD

↘ **Aug. 31, 2022:** Rahul Bingumalla, a 2nd-year MTech student from Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, ends life by hanging in his hostel room

IIT DELHI

↘ **Apr. 13, 2018:** Gopal Maloo, a first-year M.Sc. student in Chemistry, hangs himself to death in his hostel room. He was a native of Hooghly district in West Bengal

Campus placements are another time when the morale of students who don't get placed in the McKinseys and the Accentures takes a beating. "The placement and internship sessions cause maximum gaps," says Baruah. "Those who don't get good placements become aloof."

According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), student suicides saw a rise of 4.5 per cent in 2021. Experts attribute this spike to the Covid pandemic and related anxieties. Many students who joined college during the pandemic attended online classes for the first two years and reached the campus only in their third year. The high academic pressure and sudden need to adjust to a new environment played havoc on many of them.

Faizan Ahmed was one such student. Hailing from Assam's Tinsukia, he had come to the IIT Kharagpur campus in the third year of his B.Tech. degree. His decomposed body was found in his hostel room on October 14, 2022. The IIT Kharagpur management said it was a case of suicide, though his family alleged he had been murdered by fellow students since he had complained to the authorities about ragging. A police probe later led to the arrest of four students, and the Calcutta High Court accused the IIT Kharagpur authorities of "trying to cover up" Ahmed's death.

CASTE DISCRIMINATION

Few are willing to acknowledge its existence but several students from the backward communities say it is something they are routinely subjected to. Many upper caste students look upon their classmates from Scheduled Castes/Tribes backgrounds as undeserving because they get admission even after scoring relatively lower marks in the joint entrance examinations (JEE). This attitude, though not always overtly expressed, is often subtly felt by the students from reserved categories. "If there is a complaint that students from reserved categories are suffering more, we can't overlook the matter," says Professor Aditya Mittal,

“THE EMOTIONAL BOND BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IS MISSING. **INSTEAD OF BEING MENTORS, TEACHERS ARE NOW MORE LIKE INSTRUCTORS”**

SOHAM DAS *PhD scholar, IIT Delhi*

“HERE, WE ARE IN A CONTINUOUS COMPETITIVE WORLD. **IT’S NOT POSSIBLE TO PERFORM ALL THE TIME...** THOSE WHO DON’T GET GOOD PLACEMENTS START STAYING ALOOF”

PARIDHI BARUAH *B.Tech. 2nd year, IIT Guwahati*

dean of students’ affairs at IIT Delhi. “We must examine the ground realities and take steps to rectify them.”

This happens mainly because of the lack of sensitisation of upper caste students and even some teachers. Some high-caste professors consider Dalit students “uneducable”, wrote educationist Kurmana Simha Chalam in his 2007 book *Challenges of Higher Education*. In April 2021, during the Covid lockdown, a series of videos of Seema Singh, an associate professor of English at IIT Kharagpur, making casteist remarks about SC/ST students in online classes, went viral on social media.

Such incidents can contribute to an inferiority complex among reserved category students and may even provoke guilt at having secured admission with lower grades. A 2013 King’s College, London, study titled ‘Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota Policy, Social Justice and the Dalits’ concluded that casteist expression can leave Dalit students feeling that they are undeserving of their admission to higher-education institutions. The parents of Aniket Ambhore, an IIT Bombay student who died by suicide in 2014, recall how their son wanted to retake the JEE because he was ridiculed for not joining the institution on regular merit and wanted to get through the general category.

While faculty members and management may not express any discriminatory behaviour, students from backward communities, who are acutely aware of the perceived inadequacy of their educational backgrounds, find little time and support to bridge the gap. This scenario creates a feeling of diffidence in them. The IITs start conducting tests from the first month of joining and many students from marginalised communities score low marks as they don’t get enough time to prepare.

Following Aniket’s death, IIT Bombay had conducted an analysis based on students’ cumulative performance index (CPI), which measures their academic scores. The data showed that 70 per cent of the students with a CPI below five were from SC/ST backgrounds. The CPI for most general categories and OBC students ranged between 6 and 9. Such poor performances create other forms of disparities. For example, to stand for elections in IIT Delhi, a student must show good grades with an aptitude for extra-curricular activities. “The Dalit students with low CPIs are unlikely to enjoy their democratic privileges,” says a professor in the institute.

WHAT THE IITs ARE DOING

In Parliament, Sarkar said that all courses at IITs have now been introduced in regional languages to reduce stress among the students who had studied in vernacular-medium backgrounds. As a part of this initiative, the All India Council for Technical Education has released the complete syllabus of 12 different technical courses in regional languages.

According to Sarkar, the institutions are also focusing on extracurricular activities, including sports and cultural programmes, and assign one faculty advisor per 10 students to help with their academics and monitor the progress. Students, wardens and caretakers are sensitised to alert the authorities to signs of depression in fellow students so that timely clinical consultation can be provided. He also pointed to the Union government’s initiative MANODARPAN, launched during the Covid-19 outbreak, which covers a wide range of activities to provide psychological support to students, teachers and families for mental and emotional well-being.

Rattled by the increasing incidents of suicide, several IITs are taking preventive measures such as counselling and mentorship for students with low grades and backlogs in their courseloads, reducing the curriculum requirements and creating a positive environment on the campuses. IIT Bombay director Subhasis Chaudhuri has announced that the institute is working towards changes in its undergraduate curriculum to make it more relevant and motivating for students, and to reduce some of the stress.

“IF THERE IS A COMPLAINT THAT RESERVED CATEGORY **STUDENTS ARE SUFFERING MORE, WE CAN’T OVERLOOK THE MATTER.** WE MUST RECTIFY IT”

PROF. ADITYA MITTAL
Dean of Students Affairs,
IIT Delhi

4.5
PER CENT

RISE IN OVERALL STUDENT SUICIDES IN 2021, ACCORDING TO NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU DATA

IIT Delhi has also revamped its curriculum to help students tackle study pressure effectively.

All the IITs also have wellness centres now and some of them are taking innovative steps for student welfare. Mittal says early detection of symptoms is the key. “At IIT Delhi, we have a customised student and faculty mentorship programme. Six senior students take care of 10-20 juniors. The seniors identify the juniors who are suffering or facing problems and take them to a faculty member who then guides them on how to navigate the challenging systems of education,” he says. In hostels, students regularly host dinners for faculty members where both sides engage in freewheeling conversations about non-academic issues.

At IIT Guwahati, Professor Bithiah Grace Jaganathan, associate dean, students’ affairs, says the availability of counsellors in the counselling centre has been extended and mandatory interactions are held with first-year students to familiarise them with the centre and counselling services. Counsellors work in collaboration with other clubs within the institute to spread awareness regarding mental health conditions. Institute- and hostel-level welfare activities are regularly held to help students identify stress factors and how to cope with them. The centre also conducts Critical Incident Stress Debriefing immediately after every suicide for hostel mates and friends.

Students and mental health experts, however, allege that most of these student welfare cells are not functioning adequately. Others say that even at full strength, the manpower is not enough to handle the increased student load. Not everyone agrees, though. Pointing out that a faculty advisor is assigned for every 20 students, an IIT Madras student says that these advisors, if mindful of students’ grades, attendance and social behaviour, can avert suicides by helping them clear backlogs and ease academic pressure.

Everyone agrees that the authorities at the IITs need to take more proactive steps. In the first week of May, IIT Madras launched a comprehensive wellness survey, involving one-to-one conversations between students and more than 30 trained counsellors from an independent agency. Of the 35 students who died by suicide across IITs since 2018, 12 were from IIT Madras, the highest among all IITs. “IIT Madras is committed to working towards ensuring the wellness of all on her campus. The independent wellness survey is one of the important steps taken in this direction,” says its director V. Kamakoti. Dr Shetty believes there is scope to do more. “The IITs spend crores in holding tech fests every year. Some amount of money should be spent on frequent mental health camps,” he says.

Most mental health experts suggest that IITs should have longer induction schedules before regular courses begin so that students from diverse backgrounds get enough time to adjust to campus life. The management should also organise extra classes for students who have learning gaps. The pace of the semesters should also be slowed down. To prevent caste conflicts, mandatory sensitisation programmes must be introduced.

NOT A PATTERN?

While the recent spate of suicides has triggered a debate on how the IITs handle the mental health of their students, several observers and insiders assert that there is nothing that can be identified as a trend in these suicides. “These incidents are unfortunate, and we are highly affected by these distressing deaths of students,” says Mittal. “However, there is no particular pattern related to the triggers leading to such deaths.” Jaganathan, though, discerns a few. “The victims are mostly males,” she says. “Family issues are significant contributors to the stress level of students. Academic stress and psychiatric conditions are all commonly observed.”

Others think student suicides are an unfortunate reality and IITs are no exception. “Some students fail to cope with the pulls and pressures of life and take drastic steps. They could be from any institute. It’s not fair to single out IITs just because these are the country’s best,” says a professor from IIT Kharagpur. He has a point. According to the NCRB’s Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report, student suicides rose by 32 per cent between 2017 and 2021. Among the 13,000 students who died in 2021, only seven were IITians.

But that is hardly any consolation. As these bright young minds struggle with multiple issues affecting their mental health, the need of the hour is an academic environment that allows them to blossom in the right direction. When students start to slack and look for support, they need to know which door to knock on for help. ■

The Return of Handwriting

Recent studies by experts attest to the therapeutic effects of writing by hand—it helps people improve their mental health and also connect more deeply with others

By Sonali Acharjee

Putting pen to paper. There may come a time when complete bewilderment may greet that idiom, and only if you went looking for it in the archaic section of a modern online dictionary. Pen and paper, of course, could themselves become relics of another era, evoking nothing more than a strange curiosity about how people reproduced text before the age of the keyboard.

Many have pronounced the death of handwriting, both the art and the act, but some are trying to keep it alive. Pooja Dubey is doing so in Mumbai with calligraphy, and Bengaluru-based Rohini Kejriwal is reviving two forgotten traditions—letter-writing and pen pals—simultaneously. Dubey, 30, runs The Write House, a boutique handwriting and calligraphy brand. From birthdays to festivals, poems on glass bottles to wedding vows on handmade paper, she has had hundreds of clients requesting handwritten letters in different calligraphic styles, the demand for which, she says, is only rising.

Kejriwal, 32, was curating Alipore Post, an online newsletter, when in 2020 she decided to start Chitthi Exchange, a pen pal project that saw 1,200 people signing up in the first round itself. There have been some 10 rounds since. In fact,

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MANDAR DEODHAR

Kejriwal's bond with her own pen pal is still going strong, and after over 20 years of writing to each other, she attended her friend's wedding recently.

If there is one thing that Dubey and Kejriwal have in common, it is that they both found writing as an escape during the loneliness of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dubey started writing letters to herself. "I started practising calligraphy," she says. "It was only me, my worksheets and my nib. It was meditative. Even now, if I feel stressed about anything, I withdraw to my pen because it instantly relieves my stress. I inhale with every upstroke, exhale with every downstroke." Kejriwal, too, found writing as a way to beat the isolation. "It struck me how effective writing was to feel connected to others and yourself," she says.

MORE THAN JUST NOSTALGIA

In fact, you could say, there is a whole movement towards a return to writing, whether for yourself or to others. You can see it in the letter-writing carnivals, workshops and even letter museums that have come up in recent years. Once, there would be long queues in front of 'professional' letter-writers at post offices who helped people who couldn't read or write. Festivals would come bearing handwritten greetings from friends and family; lovers would save letters from their beloved. Keeping a diary or a journal remains a hobby for many even now.

Yet, it is not just nostalgia that is nudging the return to writing. Numerous studies have attested to its therapeutic effects—be it journaling, penning letters or creative writing—for several mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or even ADHD. In the fall of 2018, a sample group of 20 community members and 28 students participated in two rounds of letter exchanges. The results, published in the *Journal of Social Work* in 2021, revealed that writing letters helped participants battle loneliness and establish a sense of social connection. After attending The Daakroom Letter Writing Carnival held by the Union ministry of culture and the department of posts in Delhi last year, 10-year-old Sunaina Rustagi (*name changed*) came home with a number of new friends from different parts of the city. The event saw nearly 10,000 youngsters connect to thousands more in 50 schools across the capital. Sunaina, whose parents are divorced, found the exercise healing. She continues to write letters to stay in touch with the friends she made at the carnival and, according to her mother, is able to voice her emotions about living away from her father. This has helped Sunaina deal with anger, be more open to conversation with her parents and be happier at school. As for the hugely successful Daakroom Carnival itself, there are plans to hold another edition in the capital this year. Says co-founder Shivani Mehta, 31,

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JAI RANJIT

3

FROM A BYGONE ERA
1. Pooja Dubey shows off her calligraphy art
2. Rohini Kejriwal, who runs Chitthi Exchange
3. The Daakroom event in Delhi

DOWN POSTAL LANE
A child posts a letter at the Daakrom event in Chandigarh

The Benefits of Handwritten Communication

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- A study published in *JMIR Mental Health* in 2018, which involved 70 adults with elevated anxiety, found that writing in a journal led to decreased mental distress after a month and greater resilience after the first and second month, relative to usual care

- A study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* in 2008 traced the impact of writing on 102 chronic pain patients and found greater improvements in control over pain and depressed mood

TREATING LONELINESS

- Nearly 60 per cent Indians between the ages of 18 and 29 felt lonely during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a study published in the *Journal of Positive School Psychology* in 2022. That's concerning because loneliness can increase the risk of heart attack by 29 per cent and of stroke by 32 per cent, says the American Heart Association. Letter writing can help in such cases, as it reduces the impact of loneliness and can help establish a sense of social connection, as was found in a 2021 research study published in the *Journal of Social Work* in 2021.

LEARNING AND MEMORY

- Writing by hand creates more activity in the sensorimotor parts of the brain, as well as the hippocampus, which is associated with higher recall, according to experts

- A 2021 study by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, which tracked brain activity during classroom learning, found that cursive writing produces the best learning and memory

- A 2021 study from Johns Hopkins notes that writing by hand helps adults learn general literacy skills faster than when they learn the same material by typing or watching videos

"When the children saw the postman, they began running after him as he left with the post. It was a deeply emotional moment. The postman himself got teary-eyed.... How often does that happen in digital communication?" Before each carnival, Daakroom runs school programmes for a month or two. "The purpose is to get young people excited about something that seems so quaint, old-fashioned and yet is so powerful at expressing oneself," says Mehta.

Upasana Chaddha, a Delhi-based psychologist, says writing can help those who cannot articulate their emotions as it provides them with a non-judgemental space to express themselves. A report published in *JMIR Mental Health* in 2018, which studied 70 adults with elevated anxiety, found that journaling was associated with decreased mental distress. A 2013 study in PubMed also noted that expressive writing helped in managing depression and that the benefits lasted even four weeks after the experiment.

Not just mental health, handwritten communication is shown to improve physical wellbeing too. In a 2004 study published in *Psychosom Med*, 37 HIV-infected patients were asked to write for 30 minutes a day. Measured at baseline and two weeks, three months and six months after the writing exercise, it was seen that the count of white blood cells increased after the intervention and viral loads dropped. Similarly, a study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* in 2008 analysed the impact of writing on 102 chronic pain patients and found that writing led to greater improvements in control over pain and depressed mood and marginally greater improvements in pain severity. "The impact of handwriting is not universal," says Dr C.S. Narayanan, head of the department of neurology at HCMCT Manipal Hospital in Delhi. "But for those comfortable with the handwritten word, writing letters or in diaries can certainly help improve wellbeing."

Many psychologists now use writing as part of their treatment plans. "It does work for most patients, so we try it first,"

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says Dr Harish Shetty, a psychiatrist. "There are other alternative therapies as well, but writing is certainly emerging as a powerful tool to counter both emotional and cognitive disturbances."

LEARNING BETTER

What makes writing so effective? For one, it is said to slow down one's mind. The average typing speed is around 40 words per minute; by contrast, an average adult can write about 13 words per minute. This extra time, say experts, helps the mind pace its thoughts, absorb information, draw deeper conclusions and process emotions. There are also fewer distractions when you are writing by hand, hence improving your concentration. Dr P.R. Krishnan, senior neurologist at Fortis Hospitals, Bengaluru, recommends that writing by hand be taught early in life. "Or it is a missed opportunity," he adds.

"THE EXTRA TIME ONE TAKES TO WRITE HELPS THE MIND PACE ITS THOUGHTS, ABSORB INFORMATION AND PROCESS EMOTIONS"

DR P.R. KRISHNAN
Senior neurologist, Fortis Hospitals, Bengaluru

"WRITING IS EMERGING AS A POWERFUL TOOL TO COUNTER EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE DISTURBANCES"

DR HARISH SHETTY
Psychologist

Experiments have shown that writing can change the way your brain functions. When writing, you are not only activating the motor cortex, which makes your hand move, but also the motor planning parts of the visual cortex to visualise the letters in your mind, not to mention the neural networks associated with reading and spelling. "When your hand moves, it activates large areas of the brain responsible for working memory, hand-eye coordination, language and reasoning. It can also stimulate the hippocampus to create long-term memory," says Dr Krishnan. Sanjana Chatlani, 32, who founded The Bombay Lettering Company, a calligraphy and design studio in Mumbai, says calligraphy has helped improve not only her emotional health but also her productivity. "I feel I am more focused and attentive to detail," she says.

There are other reasons to recommend writing by hand. A study from the Johns Hopkins University published in 2021 notes that writing can improve already refined motor skills, which appears to help adults learn general literacy-related skills faster than if they tried to learn the same material by typing or watching videos. These findings were built upon a 2021 study by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, which used an electroencephalogram (EEG) to track brain activity during classroom learning. The study found that cursive handwriting produces the best learning and memory, even when using digital pens to write on a computer screen. "The use of pen and paper gives the brain more hooks to hang your memories on. Writing by hand creates much more activity in the sensorimotor parts of the brain," author Audrey van der Meer said in a 2020 news release in *Science Daily*. "A lot of senses are activated by pressing the pen on paper, seeing the letters you write, and hearing the sound you make while writing. These sensory experiences create contact between different parts of the brain and open it up for learning," she said.

Experts say that what differentiates people who appear to have higher intelligence is the constant exercising of their neural pathways. "The brain is like your hand, if you stop using it, it'll weaken. Writing benefits you anyway, but if you do unfamiliar or new writing tasks, they will strengthen your neural networks," says Dr Krishnan. Thus, learning to write in a new language or a new script, or even with a different hand, can have cognitive benefits. And perhaps calligraphy more than anything else. Since the practice involves drawing shapes and forming a script, and, at the same time, creating muscle memory to recreate the shapes, different parts of the brain get exercised. "Calligraphy is an art," says Chatlani. "On a digital screen, the machine is aware of only certain rules. But if I want to tweak a letter, add a swirl or a flourish, only handwritten script will allow that flow of expression."

Writing can be a means of release, a calming exercise when you are emotionally fraught, an outlet for creativity, or an expression of love. The effort one makes to write to someone makes receiving a handwritten note almost magical. "We are used to things being convenient. To take that extra step [to write] for someone leaves them with the feeling that you care enough for them," says Kejriwal. Dubey agrees. "Handwritten communication is something you cherish forever, and every time you read it, you revisit those emotions."

So, pick up that pen. And as the poet William Wordsworth said, fill your paper with the breathings of your heart. ■

OTT: SONAKSHI HUNTS FOR A SERIAL KILLER PG 71

REMEMBERING VIVAN SUNDARAM PG 74

LEISURE

EXHIBITION: RARE MAPS OF INDIA PG 73

Q&A WITH FAF DU PLESSIS PG 76

CINEMA

THE GREAT *Thespian*

Manoj Bajpayee's next film sees him in his first role as a lawyer

SIRF EK BANDAA KAAFI HAI, releasing on ZEE5, has Bajpayee fighting for justice for a victim of sexual abuse

Photograph by VIVEK DESAI

LAW AND BEHOLD Manoj Bajpayee in Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai

Few actors in Hindi cinema have the depth of talent that helps them survive the test of time and the change that comes with it. Manoj Bajpayee, most will agree, belongs in that exclusive league of extraordinary gentlemen. Such is his command over his craft that it feels like an intrinsic part of his being. By his own admission, he may falter with his choices, but Bajpayee the actor for the most part has emerged unblemished. A Bajpayee-starrer comes with the weight of expectation—that it will be a compelling and relevant story. After nearly three decades in front of the camera and winning three National Awards, one wonders: is acting as easy as breathing for the 54-year-old now? Bajpayee begs to differ.

"You have to work every day to make the relationship work," he says. "Just because you love to be in it doesn't mean you can take it for granted and start taking chances with it. I'm aware about how I want to evolve as an actor." In fact, most work days, he adds, tend to be "bad", but the "beauty" lies in the fallibilities. "When it is difficult to crack it, you try hammering it from all angles," he says. "Yes, it is frustrating at times. But it's that journey of searching that I enjoy the most."

For his latest OTT release, *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai* (releasing on ZEE5 on May 23), Bajpayee's journey sees him playing P.C. Solanki, a lawyer who made it his mission to secure justice for a minor who accused the influential godman Asaram Bapu of sexual abuse. Bajpayee met Solanki straight on set, with the idea being to capture his essence without imitation. He identified with Solanki's "stubbornness", an attitude he says has kept him in the running too. "He [Solanki] is relentless," he says. "Once he takes on something, he goes after it and takes it to a positive conclusion."

Interestingly, *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai* is the first time that Bajpayee, who has made a living creating heroes out of ordinary men, plays a lawyer in a film. It was anything but easy. "There are too many lines to memorise and you have to maintain the realism [while doing so]," he says. The climax with its seven pages worth of dialogues posed a challenge. It didn't help that director Apoorv Singh Karki aimed to shoot it in one go. "There was no other option but to rehearse it 150 times. I stopped counting after that," he says. "I couldn't do it justice until then. So yes, [acting] is not as easy as breathing."

> The film continues Bajpayee's penchant for collaborating with new directors

The film also continues Bajpayee's penchant for collaborating with new directors and those who have an indie spirit running through their veins. It has resulted in some career-defining work for the actor in the past decade, including *Aligarh* (Hansal Mehta), *Bhonsle* (Devashish Makhija) and *Gali Guleiyan* (Dipesh Jain). Says Bajpayee, "People who are experimenting with the medium are the ones I love the most. I get an opportunity to explore new things through my craft and it helps me to grow as an actor." Finding distribution for these films continues to be hard, but it doesn't deter Bajpayee from doing "things purely for yourself, for the love of acting and cinema". Cinema, he adds, is an art form first.

That's not to say there's "malice" for commercial cinema. His filmography is a testament to that. His request before he signs the dotted line is simple. "I am always requesting them to come up with a concrete story and solid character so that I can surprise myself and the audience at the same time," says Bajpayee.

Until that happens, 2023 will see Bajpayee in more indie films: *Joram* with Makhija, *Despatch* with Kanu Behl (*Titli*) and an untitled one with Raam Reddy (*Thithi*). Where they will appear—at a festival, on the big screen or a streaming platform—is not known. But it is on the last of those that the actor is currently thriving and expanding his fan base. For many, he's not the compelling Bhiku Mhatre of *Satya*, but the endearing Srikant Tiwari of *The Family Man*. Later this year, he features alongside Konkona Sen Sharma in the Netflix series *Soup* helmed by Abhishek Chaubey. Bajpayee on his part is relishing each second of his busy calendar. "It took me three decades to come to a place where I am finally getting choices," he says. "I hope and pray that they don't stop." Given what he's capable of, it's a win-win for both the creators and the audiences. ■

Suhani Singh

MURDERS SHE SOLVED

Web series about serial killers are rare in India, but **Sonakshi Sinha**-starrer ***Dahaad*** takes a stab at the genre

Crime has been a staple of Indian web series, but few creators have attempted one set around a serial killer (Voot Select's *Asur* and ZEE5's *Duranga* come closest). Enter Reema Kagti and Zoya Akhtar, whose second show, *Dahaad* (streaming on Prime Video), involves a bunch of police officers following the trail of one. A slow burn of a crime drama, it's one where the audience is always two steps ahead of the police and the thrills and twists are few and far between.

It's not for lack of trying. Sonakshi Sinha, who learned judo, bike riding and a Rajasthani dialect to play Anjali Bhaati a.k.a. 'Bhaati Saheb', the sole woman in the police station, battles casteism and patriarchy while leading an investigation to hunt down a smooth-talking predator who lures women into running away with him under the pretext of marriage. The said serial killer is essayed with understated flair by Vijay Varma, by far the show's most impressive character despite the script not offering an entirely convincing set-up for his motivations and ability to pull off his many crimes. Varma consulted a psychiatrist to break down the "twisted mind". "They [serial killers] are good at lying and being invisible when they want," says Varma.

Set in Mandawa, a small town in Rajasthan, Kagti and Akhtar use the backdrop to highlight the fault lines of caste and religion in the region, which leads to some half-hearted socio-cultural commentary. Sinha and her superiors, played by Gulshan Devaiah and Sohum Shah, are pressured to intimidate a young Muslim man who has married the Hindu daughter of an influential politician. For Varma, who has earlier collaborated with Akhtar and Kagti on *Gully Boy*, it showcases the filmmakers' need "to send a bigger message through the cinema they are making".

Not every crime drama has to be a whodunit or adhere to the tropes of the genre, but *Dahaad* fails to lure audiences into its police procedural. As the body count rises (credit to Kagti and Ruchika Oberoi for avoiding the blood and gore) and the catch-me-if-you-can drama drags on, the plot gets repetitive and tiring. It doesn't help that the personal arcs of the three officers—the men feud with their wives while Sinha's Anjali contends with an overbearing mother (Jayati Bhatia in a thankless role)—don't add much meat to the proceedings. By episode six, *Dahaad* struggles to stay afloat as all the characters do is keep giving instructions to each other to follow leads. It comes down to Varma to do much of the heavy lifting as he demonstrates how not all serial killers need to be deranged and creepy. The menacing killer could very well be the regular family-man next door. ■

> **DAHAAD** is a slow burn of a crime drama, where the audience is always two steps ahead of the police

Suhani Singh

▼ **POLICE PROCEDURAL** Sonakshi Sinha in a still from *Dahaad* (Prime Video)

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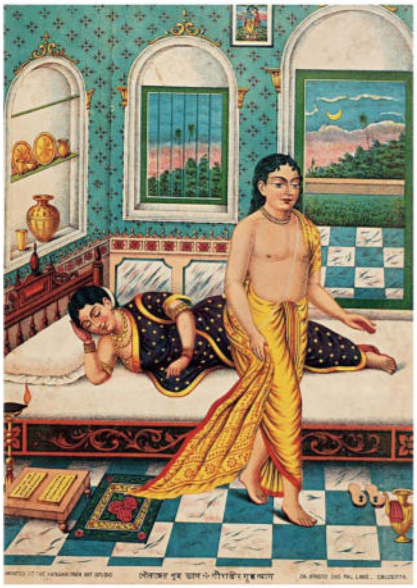

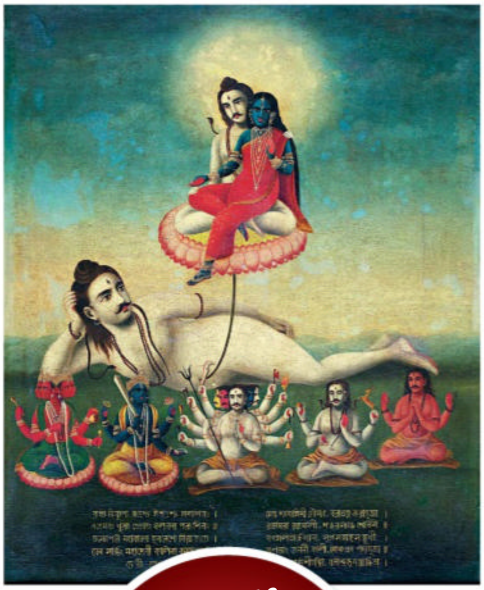

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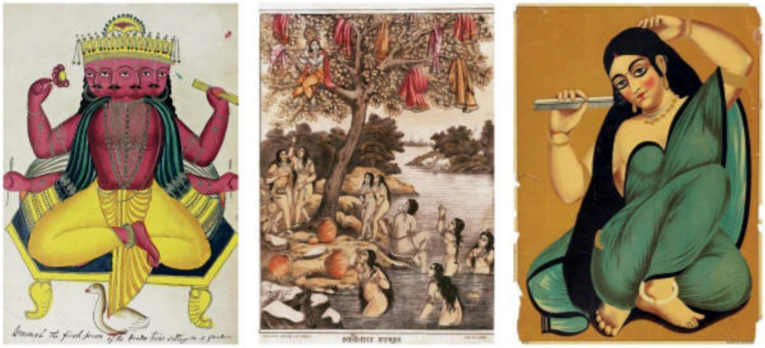


A SHARED CONTEXT
Selected artworks from the exhibition and its accompanying volume

THE BABU & THE BAZAAR Art From 19th And Early 20th Century Bengal is showing at DAG, 22A, Janpath Road, Windsor Place, New Delhi, till July 1 (11 am - 7 pm)

EXHIBITION

ENTANGLED *Imaginings*

The Babu and the Bazaar is a reminder of the scandalous fecundity and delight on offer in the visual arts of colonial Calcutta

An oil painting depicting Draupadi's *vastraharan* with a distinctly European gaze, 'reverse-glass' paintings of the Hindu pantheon churned out by ateliers in Canton, a pin-up print of a voluptuous merry widow. And an unconscious rendering of the Indian subcontinent's sacred geography as Saraswati. These are just some of the wildly diverse and yet kindred images on display at the DAG gallery's new flagship showroom in Delhi—and in the sumptuous volume that commemorates it.

As the show's title suggests, these eclectic pictures are united by time (19th and early 20th century) and place (Bengali). This shared context is productively and provocatively explored in the text, which draws out a visual genealogy that goes back to the scroll paintings used by *patua* performing artists. The transformation of that kinetic folk-art form into more static individual frames for solipsistic consumption is a well-documented parable of Indian art's encounter with colonial modernity and the age of mechanical reproduction. But by juxtaposing watercolour *pats* with a range of art in other mediums—oil paintings, woodcuts, metal engravings, lithographs and chromolithographs—that were jostling for attention in the art bazaar that was colonial Calcutta, this selection offers a reminder of the scandalous fecundity and visual delight of this encounter.

While the march of money and class is explicit in the ostentation of the oil paintings or the precious metals slathered on some prints, it becomes clear that social hierarchy was constantly subverted in this melting pot of aesthetics, technology and technique. Somehow the sheer novelty of cheap mass-produced colours and mechanical printing mirrors the lively and scurrilous imagination of the subaltern *pats*, overwhelming the staid aspirational aesthetics of the elites.

The rather genteel text accompanying these exuberant images describes a “stylistic confluence” at work here. There are surely more robust words for this dazzling zoetrope of tradition and innovation, eroticism and piety, commercialism and craft. These are visions of the entangled imaginations of early Hindu modernity and colonial capitalism in plain sight. All the images in this show are ‘registered historical artefacts’ more than a century old, we are reminded, but they pulse with the energetic parochial cosmopolitanism that still enlivens popular art, religion and politics today. ■

Kai Friese

EXHIBITION

YOU’VE BEEN MAPPED

Rare maps of India from the 19th century are on view at an ongoing exhibition at the Asiatic Society of Mumbai

TIME TRAVEL
1. An old map of Nepal along the Indian border
2. A replica of a surveyor’s theodolite
3. The exhibits on display in the Durbar Hall

Tracing a finger across a map is a beautiful way to time travel across vast expanses of land. At the exhibition titled *Mapped!: Surveys that Left Behind a Legacy*, at the Asiatic Society of Mumbai, the experience of studying contour lines and topographical terrains quickly turns into the stories of the surveyors who believed in their methods and assigned survey parties that partook the journey to gather the data.

In 2019, the Urban Heritage Committee of the Rotary Club of Bombay extended their support to the Asiatic Society of Mumbai for a Cartographic Conservation Project, with an aim to conserve around 100 maps from the library’s rare map collection. Out of these, around 12 are on display at the ongoing exhibition.

Surveys and cartography in India were fuelled by Britain’s imperial ambitions, their primary purpose being to deepen the hold on the land and maximise revenue. For the scientists and surveyors, on the other hand, the exercise stemmed from a curiosity to discover unexplored lands and measure them as accurately as possible. The exhibition opens with the marine survey and the first ever accurate map of India (1788) by James Rennell, the Surveyor General of Bengal. Studying the coasts meant trade openings and entry points into the subcontinent (look out for Pirate Coast along the Konkan).

The most intriguing section covers the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, spearheaded by William Lambton in the early 1800s. This involved the measurement of the Great Arc of the Meridian, which runs 1,600 miles from Cape Comorin to Dehradun. After Lambton’s death, the survey was completed by British geodesist Sir George Everest.

The maps are supported by stories of the people who made it possible, technology that promised accuracy and trials faced by survey parties, ranging from mental illnesses to plague.

Col. Montgomerie trained native Indians as spies to venture into countries situated north of India. Dressed as monks, they relied on rosaries to measure their footcounts and prayer wheels to hide their notes. One of them, a Sikkimese tailor named Kinthup, was sold as a slave to a village headman, and his discovery of the Brahmaputra went unrecognised at the time. He did eventually make it back to India, though.

Deepti Anand, co-founder, Past Perfect Heritage Management that has curated the exhibition, says, “There’s a larger story behind each map and we believe people can discover layers of a single object through these stories.”

MAPPED! SURVEYS THAT LEFT BEHIND A LEGACY is on at the Durbar Hall, Asiatic Society of Mumbai, till June 4 (1 pm - 6 pm)

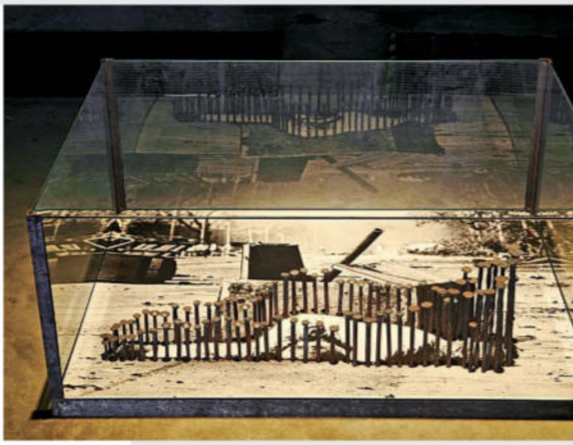
The last section zooms into Bombay in the 1870s—neighbourhoods of present-day Tardeo, Kamathipura, Grant Road, Girgaon, Umerkhadi, Mazgaon and Byculla are part of the Second Bombay Revenue Survey (1865-72) done by Col. George Laughton. Here, one gets to visualise the city in its formative years, first caged within the fort walls, and how it slowly expanded into unique cultural pockets. There are tales of the advent of mills and the now-submerged Belvedere Hills of Mazgaon waiting to be discovered.

By now, the eye has acclimatised to squinting for details as the maps turn into articulate storytellers. Stop by at the interactive digital screen to zoom into regions on the map, or pick up a map print at the gift booth if the exhibition leaves you hungry for more. ■

Phorum Pandya

Photographs (c) Tate (Reece Straw)

IN MEMORIAM
Installations at
Tate Modern 2023



ART

THE ART OF REMEMBERING

The late **Vivan Sundaram**'s *Memorial* 1993-2014 is showing at the Tate Modern in London

- Vivan Sundaram: Memorial *1993-2014*
- *The Tanks, Tate Modern, London*
- *Till September 3, 2023*

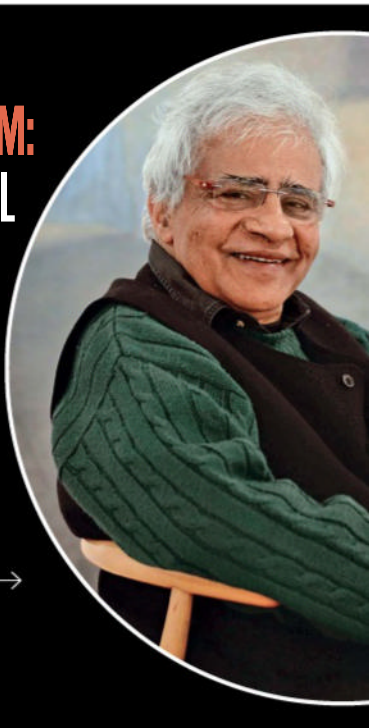
1943: Born to Indira Sher-Gil, sister of painter Amrita Sher-Gil, and Kalyan Sundaram, who later became Chief Election Commissioner of India and Chairman of the Law Commission

Early 1960s: Vivan Sundaram joins the most innovative fine arts department in the country at the M.S. University in Baroda. He's taught by K.G. Subramanyan and Sankho Chaudhuri. Comes into contact with artists such as Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Nasreen Mohamedi and Bhupen Khakhar–most of the radical cohort with whom he will be associated throughout his life

1966-1970: Sundaram joins the Slade School of Art and studies with R.B. Kitaj. He finds himself in the thick of the massive student protests that are igniting all over Western Europe and America. 1968 is a year that opens up radical paths for many young artists and Sundaram is one of them. He stays on in London till 1970 and gets arrested and put into Wandsworth Jail for a short while

1970s: Returning to India, Sundaram re-connects with his Baroda circle. He also immediately starts finding ways to combine his art with his political convictions. Around this time also finds his life partner in Geeta Kapur who is becoming known as an art critic and theorist. Through the 1970s and especially during the Emergency, Sundaram works with artists and workers' groups to organise events and protests. Makes the noted 'The Heights of Macchu Picchu' drawings after the Pablo Neruda poem

VIVAN SUNDARAM: AN ARTFUL LIFE



T

The cavernous spaces of the Tanks house the complex, well-known installation, laid out in a nod to a typical memorial for some great departed figure. A pathway of red tiles leads from the metal entrance barriers all the way to the other end to a gateway made from metal trunks of diminishing size, the kind used by the poorest travelling workers in our country.

Near the middle of this pathway is a pyramid made from black marble and glass, within which is a white plaster corpse in the contorted position in which the man fell at the moment of death. Walking around, we realise the plaster cast and indeed the whole installation stem from an actual photograph—taken by photographer Hoshi Jal during the post Babri-destruction violence in Bombay in March 1993—of an anonymous, male riot victim lying dead in front of a low concrete structure on a road. This photograph of the dead man is repeated in a loosely circular conclave around the central pathway and the plaster body. Here he is curved into a concrete and metal shield; here he is as an almost imperceptible, darkly solarised ghost; here he is in a set of small prints, each hammered under with a grid of small nails, like a *baanshaiya*—except this bed of arrows can only be for us and our living perception.

Memorial is a complex installation; with the artist working at many different material, historical and symbolic levels. On the black marble slab of the central pyramid-vitrine is an inlaid image that is a homage to Kazimir Malevich, the great Ukrainian-Soviet abstractionist; the pyramidal glass tomb itself reminds one of the tombs of Lenin and Stalin at the Kremlin, except here exhibited for history is not a 'great leader' but an anonymous, ultimately powerless victim of an ordinary man. Another floor-based vitrine displays a maze of blocks that remind one of architectural models of proposed projects, except this particular jumble could perhaps only be a Bombay *jhopadpatti*.

With the artist working at many different material, historical and symbolic levels, **MEMORIAL** is a complex installation

Engaging with this grim constellation in 2023, you find yourself asking whether it is just the ordinary man you are mourning or an idea of a nation and a society. You find yourself thinking about power and the many and repeated misuses of it, you think yourself thinking of shrouds, funeral pyres, processions, wakes for justice, for ideas of secularism and genuine democracy. Seeing *Memorial* installed in the Tanks of the Tate Modern, one of the world's major museums of contemporary art, just a few days after the loss of Sundaram himself (he was closely involved in the display), also changes the way you look at the work. You recognise that this is now immovably the fulcrum piece of the great and varied career of one of India's most powerful and important artists. Seeing the piece laid out in this international context, you also realise how it speaks quietly and clearly to not just Bombay and Babri, not just Naroda Patiya or Muzaffarnagar, but to many places across the globe. ■

Ruchir Joshi

RAJWANT RAWAT

1981: Sundaram participates in the pivotal *Place for People* group exhibition with Jogen Chowdhury, Sudhir Patwardhan, Nalini Malani, Bhupen Khakhar and Gulammohammed Sheikh—making figurative works that examine the artists' own worlds. The exhibition overturns the hegemony of the earlier generations of painters such as Husain, Souza and the Progressives group

1980s: Sundaram organises artist retreats and workshops at the Sher-Gil bungalow in Kasauli. Connected to the discussions at Kasauli, the influential *Journal of Arts and Ideas* begins to be published at this time, edited by Geeta Kapur and others

1993 onwards: Sundaram moves away from traditional painting on canvas and paper, concentrating on working in other media, including installations and digitally processed photography

1993: *Memorial*. Sundaram's first installation work is created as a response to the violence that follows the destruction of the Babri Masjid, especially the rioting and killings that target poor Muslims in Bombay

1991: In response to the first Gulf War, Sundaram produces a series of powerful drawings titled *Engine Oil and Charcoal* made from vehicle oil and engine detritus

1998: Sundaram executes a massive site-specific installation/performance at the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, highlighting labour struggles in the context of imperialism and its aftermath. The project has now been distilled as a book, *History Project*

2000-2023: Several major exhibitions in India and internationally, including a retrospective at the Kiran Nadar Museum, *Step Inside and You are No Longer a Stranger/ Disjunctures*, and a show at Haus Der Kunst, Munich, both in 2018

Trial by CRICKET

*Cricketer **Faf du Plessis** recalls key moments in his career as his no-holds-barred autobiography **Faf Through Fire** hits bookstores in India*

GETTY IMAGES

Q. People usually write autobiographies at the end of their careers. Why did you write yours now?

While I was playing for South Africa, I never had the time to write a book or felt it was something I wanted to do. Then Covid came and we had a lot of time. I went through the journals I had kept over the years and the notes I had made on team culture and leadership, and felt there was something of value I could get across in a book. I thought it would take about a year but it became two-and-a-half years.

Q. Your ODI debut in 2011 was in a match against India. Do you remember that day?

It was one of the most special days of my life as it marked my international debut for South Africa. I even tattooed it on my arm. It's something you work hard for in terms of getting that opportunity to play for your country. That entire year was special because it was also the year of my IPL debut.

Q. You talk about the 'Zipgate' controversy quite frankly in the book. How did you handle that phase of your life?

Zipgate was a challenging period for me, but as you'll see in the book, I speak about a lot of different instances that are not always easy to talk about. It was important for me to be honest about a lot of things that happened through my career as well as be vulnerable about it so that people could really see my heart and all of it. Zipgate was something bad that happened to me but a lot of good came from it. From a value perspective I made a real shift in direction after that.

Q. What has the experience of captaining RCB been like?

It has been incredible. It came at a time when people were thinking I was getting towards the end of my career because of my lack of playing international cricket and choosing to play more in the circuit in terms of T20 cricket. It gave me real purpose and I put all my energy towards building the team. Virat [Kohli] has been an exceptional support, and I'm grateful to him for letting me do things my way.

with Amit Dixit

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